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# HINTS ON LANGUAGE

R. J. ISNARD

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# HINTS ON LANGUAGE

AS A MEANS OF

## MENTAL DISCIPLINE

AND ON THE

### IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY OF MODERN LANGUAGES

BY

R. J. ISNARD

*NEW EDITION, REVISED AND IN PART REWRITTEN,  
WITH AN APPENDIX ON THE BEST METHOD  
OF STUDYING LANGUAGES*

BY

H. J. WEINTZ

London :

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE

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PROFESSOR ISNARD had long reached the place of honour amongst the philologists and teachers of Genoa. English by birth, Italian by election, he occupied for thirty years the Chair of Professor of Foreign Languages in most of the Public Institutes of Genoa, including the Naval and Military School, the Technical Institute, the superior Naval School, &c. It will be easily understood how, from his long experience as a teacher and writer, he was qualified to give an authoritative opinion on the methods of learning languages, together with many other works written by him. His "Hints on Language" obtained general approbation. One of his works was dedicated to the Royal Prince Amadeo, whose tutor he had been; as also of His Royal Highness Prince Odone.

In the year 1865 he was knighted by order of His Majesty King Victor Emmanuel, and in the year 1883 he again received the honour of knighthood from King Humbert. He would no doubt have received higher honours if death had not arrested his brilliant career in the midst of the esteem of learned and scientific men.

# ANALYTICAL CONTENTS

## CHAPTER I.

	Page
Linguistic study of immemorial antiquity—Importance of the subject— Definition of terms—Extract from Brown's Lectures—Speech a divine gift; popular apathy thereto—Thought and language closely inter- woven; Bacon's remarks thereon—A people's vocabulary a criterion of the quality of their conceptions—Dugald Stewart on the improvement of language—Two purposes in linguistic study .....	1

## CHAPTER II.

Quintilian on language as a means of mental discipline—Julius Cæsar as a philologist—Allusion to his works on the subject—Dr. Faraday on the importance of accurate definition.....	10
---	----

## CHAPTER III.

Archbishop Trench on the study of words—Whewell on Language—Analysis of language indispensable in psychological research—Leibnitz's remarks in this connection—Bonald on metaphysical speculations—Importance of the mother-tongue in the culture of the intellectual faculties— Quotations from Grimm and Schlegel in support.....	16
---	----

## CHAPTER IV.

Decadence of faith in the indispensability of classical study—Locke on youth- ful education—Dr. Latham on the classical languages—Comparison therewith of French, Italian, etc.—Individuality of modern literature— Inducements to the study of Latin and Greek—Benjamin Franklin's testimony .....	28
---	----

## CHAPTER V.

Transpositive and Analogous Languages—Their classification—Their merits and demerits—Locke on the <i>desiderata</i> of a language—Crombie's remarks on the pre-eminence of the Analogous Languages—De Quincey on Kant's style.....	40
---	----

## CHAPTER VI.

Derivative or Composite Languages—Fallacies with regard to their inferiority —Max Müller on literary dialects—Schlegel and Blair in favour of derivative languages—Grimm on the excellencies of the English tongue —English onomatopœias—Illustrations thereof from Dryden and Milton . . . . .	47
---	----

## CHAPTER VII.

Nature and history of words—Coleridge and Max Müller thereon—Metaphor —Examples thereof—Decay and death of words—Changes in meaning —Changes in form—Guizot's theory—Dean Swift's facetious derivations.	62
--	----

## CHAPTER VIII.

Influences of the misuse of words—Familiarity with the language of a country necessary to a competent judgment of its literature—Niebuhr in this connection—Addison on peculiarities of the English language—National character reflected in language . . . . .	75
--	----

## CHAPTER IX.

Influence of the Bible on English language—Illustrations thereof from various authors—Current phrases emanating from sundry writers—Preponder- ance of Shakspearean phrases—La Fontaine's contributions—Dante's influence—Norman influence on English language—Illustrations from Scott's works . . . . .	85
---	----

## CHAPTER X.

A Universal Language—Advantages thereof—Many writers in favour of the possibility of its compilation—Record of various attempts towards this end—Summary . . . . .	98
APPENDIX—On the best method of studying Foreign Languages . . . . .	113

## INTRODUCTION.

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THE Royal Commission on the Depression of Trade stated in their report (ed. 1887), that, "In the matter of education, we [*i.e.*, the English people] seemed to be particularly deficient as compared with some of our foreign competitors ; and this remark applied not only to what is usually called technical education, but to the ordinary commercial education which is required in mercantile houses, *and especially the knowledge of foreign languages.*" In other words, while our "Competitors," whether French, German, Dutch, and even Japanese, were devoting themselves to the study of our language, few Englishmen—even of the class likely to benefit by so absolutely necessary an acquirement—seemed to think it worth their while to devote any time to the study of foreign languages. That young Englishmen should see themselves ousted from the counting-houses of their own countrymen by foreigners capable of doing that which they were incapable

of doing, of conducting the foreign correspondence of their employers in the language of their customers, whether French, German, Spanish or Italian—followed as a matter of necessity, and (as it appears to us) of righteous consequence.

When we consider the facilities offered in the Metropolis for the study of foreign languages at a trifling cost, and the facilities offered by the Athenæums and literary institutions of nearly every town of the provinces, the question naturally occurs to us, why such a state of things should exist. If, however, we consider the mode in which education is conducted in this country, the absolute discouragement which is shown to the study of the Continental languages in our schools and seminaries of learning, an answer to the question will not be difficult to find.

“Discouragement” may be a strong word, but it is the only one which properly expresses our meaning. Instead of being made—as they undoubtedly should be made—part of the daily *curriculum* at our public and private schools, the Continental languages and literature are invariably relegated to the branches of study called “extras.” Writing of the classical languages of Greece and Rome, the Rev. Sydney Smith, while canvassing their merits “as vehicles of thought and passion,” describes

all modern languages, in comparison with them, as "dull, ill-contrived and barbarous." If the statement seems overstrained, it is merely the prelude to a severe attack, which the "witty Canon of St. Paul's" subsequently makes upon the method of teaching the classical languages in this country. He speaks in terms of unqualified disapprobation of the practice, then, and even now, in vogue, of making their study "the sole and exclusive occupation" of the student till he has attained the age of three or four-and-twenty. We cannot expect a classical scholar to endorse these remarks of the Edinburgh Reviewer without some qualification, but we do see considerable force in the statement of a modern Italian writer that, "the man who has not a sufficient knowledge of the four illustrious languages in which the more civilized nations of the world think, speak, and write, has not the right, in spite of all his classical attainments, to call himself a truly learned man.

Apart from the commercial and social benefits which the accomplishment brings with it, the advantage of possessing a competent knowledge of a foreign language, rich in its treasures of history, poetry, and romance, must be apparent to everyone who aspires to travel out of the field of English literature, biography, and history. If the student desires to make acquaintance with the true literary *styles* of German writers,

such as La Motte-Fouqué, of Musæus, of Schiller, of Tieck, of Goethe, or, in the Spanish tongue, of Lazarillo de Tormes, of Guzman d'Alfarache, of Miguel Cervantes, of Pedro Calderon de la Barca, it is obvious that he must be able to read and select passages from the original works of those distinguished authors. The same remarks apply of course with equal force to the masters of Italian literature. The styles of Boccaccio, of Ariosto, and of later writers, such as Metastasio, Goldoni, and Alfieri, can only be learnt by reading them in the beautiful language in which their compositions are expressed: the influence which Dante exercised upon his age and his contemporaries can be appreciated only by those who possess a competent knowledge of the Italian language and of Italian history and literature.

In bringing this introduction to a close, we may be expected to say something in reference to the best method of acquiring a knowledge of a foreign language. Emphatically, then, there is no "royal road to learning" of this kind. At the outset of his task the student must be prepared to encounter thorough and unquestionably hard work. Grammar, which Dr. Johnson has described as "the science of speaking correctly, the art which teaches the relation of words to each other," is of course an essential

means to the end. To go through the grammar of one language thoroughly is of great use in the mastery of every other grammar, for the reason that there obtains through all languages a certain analogy to each other in their grammatical construction. As regards the books to be recommended for the purposes of study, their name, of course, is legion, but those prepared on Hossfeld's Method,\* combining, as it does, a grammar, a reader, and numerous pages of English and foreign dialogues and commercial correspondence, appear to us admirably fitted to teach a language in the simplest and easiest way. Let the student, last of all, follow the advice contained in Herrick's aphorism: "Attempt the end, and never stand to doubt; nothing's so hard, but search will find it out." *Search* of course stands for perseverance; and with the aid of perseverance, learning, at first a difficult task, becomes at last an easy and a pleasant one.

\* Hirschfeld Brothers, Limited, 13 Fumival Street, Holborn, E.C.



# HINTS ON LANGUAGE

AS A MEANS OF

## MENTAL DISCIPLINE.

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L'étude des langues est la première et la plus indispensable de toutes les études.—P. H. SUSANNE.

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### CHAPTER I.

Linguistic study of Immemorial Antiquity—Importance of the Subject—Definition of Terms—Extract from Brown's Lectures—Speech a Divine Gift ; popular apathy thereto—Thought and Language closely interwoven ; Bacon's remarks thereon—A people's vocabulary a criterion of the quality of their conceptions—Dugald Stewart on the improvement of Language—Two purposes in Linguistic Study.

LANGUAGE, in every civilized country, has ever been deemed a matter of paramount importance, and has consequently called forth the energies and constant attention of some of the most profound philosophers of every age and clime, no matter to what school they may have belonged.

Nor would it be hard to assign a cause in

favour of the object of this pursuit ; for speech—they well knew—is at once the sign and the means of man's superiority over the brute creation.

Figuratively the term “language” has been extended to signify any means by which one sentient being imparts to another what it thinks or feels. Thus, we say “the language of the eyes,” “the language of signs,” “the language of birds.” But in ordinary usage the term signifies the system of sounds uttered by the human voice in social intercourse—articulate speech—and it is language in this acceptation—the communication of human thought through the instrumentality of spoken signs\*—that is the subject of the present work, and though philologists are divided in their opinion as to whether language be an inherent quality of the mind, or, in other words, a gift bestowed by the divine Creator on man, or whether it be but a mere human discovery or invention, they are all at one on this head—that it is essential to

\*Such is the true etymological meaning of “Language,” which is a French word formed from *langue*, the tongue. In classical Latin the form is *lingua* ; but the ancient form was *dingua*, with which the English word “tongue” is probably cognate.

his being, and that it finally becomes part and parcel of his very existence.

Through language, man is enabled to express his wants, to impart his pleasures and social enjoyments, and through it alone can his moral acquirements be made and conquered, as it really becomes for him the weapon of his mind. "Language is the instrument by which Socrates brought wisdom down from heaven to earth, and Newton made the heavens themselves, and all the wonders they contain, descend as it were to be grasped and measured by the feeble hand of man. But its noblest benefit is the permanent transmission of thought, which gives to each individual the power and wisdom of his species, or, rather, it gives him the rich inheritance of the accumulated acquisitions of all the multitudes who, like himself, in every preceding age, have inquired and meditated, and and patiently discovered; or, by the happy inspiration of genius, have found truths which they hardly sought, and penetrated, with the rapidity of a single glance, those depths of nature which the weak steps and dim torchlight of generations after generations had vainly laboured to explore. By that invention, which

we owe indirectly to the ear, the boundaries of time seem to be removed. Nothing is past, for everything lives as it were before us. The thoughts of beings who had trod the most distant periods, arise again in our mind with the same warmth and freshness as when they first awoke to life in the bosom of their authors."\*

Language not only admits us to the thought of all ages upon all subjects, but it is itself the product, the very image, of thought; exhibiting principles and conforming to laws in every aspect of it; so that, in tracing and applying its words, flexions, and propositions, the mind is tracing and applying principles in a limitless variety of application. In this exercise lies the influence of mental discipline possessed by any subject.

The generality of men, however, are wholly insensible to the divine gift they are possessed of—speech. The use of speech ought not to be—and with thinking men is not—a purely mechanical means of communicating our ideas. If we carefully watch the workings of our minds and weigh the words we make use of, we shall find that one word naturally calls up another,

\* BROWN—Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind.

this again is followed by others, and these in their turn are suggestive of new ideas, and so on ; so that language actually becomes not only the germ and seed, but the "awakener and stirrer" of thought. Thought and language are, in truth, so closely interwoven with each other that scarcely any of the workings of the mind can be carried on without the help of the latter, so much so that language might be properly called the handmaid of the mind, her constant attendant, and one ever ready to obey her behests by naming with the swiftness of thought itself the object she has given birth to.

The ability to define our thoughts, and to express them in a lucid systematic manner, may be taken as a practical test of the character of our intellectual education. Who has not often felt his mind cramped and ill at ease whenever some indefinable idea was floating, or straying, as it were unnamed and unregistered, through his brain for want of a term to fix and embody it in an external sign ; and that until he had found one, there was no possibility of his grasping and securing it in his mind ? Bacon must have had before him this troubled state of

the mind, when held under restraint, or led on by the impulse of the moment to give vent to its emotions, when he said: "Men think their reason governs their words; but it often happens that words have power enough to react upon them." \*

The language of a people or class of people may be held to be the criterion of their conceptions—rich or poor as these are copious or scanty. It is not merely the medium of their thought, but its reflection and record; and an examination of their lexicon will admit us to the whole domain of their ideas. An analysis of their vocabulary exhibits the *conceptions* which have been found useful or necessary by individuals in general; and thus it sufficiently indicates the ground we should occupy in the culture of this faculty. Innumerable *conceptions* are enshrined in language which a person would never apprehend but for the fact that he meets with the words which signify them, though they have an existence in the mind apart from any concrete embodiment according to the

\* Credunt enim homines rationem suam verbis imperare, sid fit etiam verba vim suam super intellectum retorqueant et reflectant.—Nov. Org. Aph. 69.

doctrine in philosophy. As examples, we may adduce the conceptions embodied in the series of descriptive epithets applied to the plant, the stream, or the sky. It is the occurrence of the epithets that suggests an examination of the things conceived, and the terms will remain unintelligible, till the conceptions which they denote are traced.

“It is by the improvement of our language,” says one of the greatest thinkers of our times, “that the progress of the mind is continued from one generation to another; and that acquirements of the enlightened few are insensibly imparted to the many. Whatever tends to diminish the ambiguities of speech, or to fix with more logical precision the import of general terms; and, above all, whatever tends to embody in popular forms of expression the ideas of the wise and the good, augments the natural powers of the human understanding, and enables the succeeding race to start from a higher ground than was required by their fathers. The remark applies with equal force to the study of the mind itself—a study where the chief source of error is the imperfection of words; and where every improvement on this

great instrument of thought may be justly regarded in the light of a discovery." \*

Before proceeding further it may be advisable to define what is commonly meant by the study of Language, and the study of Languages.

Linguistic study may be undertaken for two very different purposes. In most instances, the object in studying a language is to be able to understand it, and to speak and write it. From the time when we commence to lisp to the time we leave school, and even later, we are principally engaged in acquiring the use of our native tongue, or of other living or dead languages. There is, however, another aspect of the subject matter. We may study two or more languages in order to compare them with one another, and observe the expressions in which they agree and in which they differ. It is the conclusions thus arrived at that form what are termed the general principles or laws of language——*Universal Grammar*——as distinguished from the peculiarities of individual languages. As to our making any reflections on the first of these two divisions, which, as has already been observed, is so

\* DUGALD STEWART.—On the Human Mind.

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closely connected with the study of the mind, we confess ourselves totally incompetent for such a task, after so many profound philosophers have so ably expatiated on this important subject ; but as the works of some of these writers are not likely to come within reach of many of our foreign readers, we beg to premise that we shall make free use of such passages of their writings as bear directly upon the subject in question.

## CHAPTER II.

Quintilian on Language as a means of mental discipline—Julius Cæsar as a philologist—Allusion to his works on the subject—Dr. Faraday on the importance of accurate definition.

Dry and intricate as the study of the elements of language may appear, yet it may safely be asserted that there is no other that will bring in a more abundant harvest to the husbandman; none that will more amply reward the time and labour bestowed on it. And the importance of the subject will admit of it being repeated, that, if speech is the vehicle and interpreter of the *conceptions* of our minds, an examination of its structure and progress cannot but unfold many things concerning the nature and progress of the things conceived, and the operations of our faculties. "Let no man," says Quintilian, "despise as unworthy his attention the elements of grammar, because it may appear of small consequence to show the distinction

between vowels and consonants, and to divide the latter into liquids and mutes. But they who penetrate into the innermost part of this temple of science will there discover such refinement and subtilty of matter as is not only proper to sharpen the understandings of the young, but sufficient to give exercise to the most profound erudition.”\*

So thought Julius Cæsar; witness him, in fact, in the hurry and bustle of a camp, ever alive to the improvement of his mind by his constant attention to the study of language. Among other works which he wrote, he is said to have addressed two books to Cicero on the Analogy of Language, or the *Method* of speaking Latin with the greatest propriety;† and on another occasion he wrote a poem, entitled *The Journey*, while travelling into Spain with the utmost rapidity to oppose the projects of the sons of Pompey. Quintilian says of him,

\* Nequis tanquam parva fastidiat grammatices elementa. Non quia magnæ sit operæ consonantes a vocalibus discernere, easque in semivocalium numerum, mutarumque partiri, sed quia interiora velut sacri hujus adumtibus, apperebit multa rerum subtilitas, quæ non modo acuere ingenia puerilia, sed exercere altissimam quoque eruditionem ac scientiam possit.

† CICERO—De claris oratoribus, c. 72.

that he spoke and wrote with the same force with which he fought. This remark of the eminent rhetorician's will acquire still greater weight, when we consider, that in Rome, even a mediocre acquaintance with the Latin language was so rarely to be met with, that persons even among the higher ranks were as much noted for the greater or less degree of fluency with which they spoke their own tongue, or for any knowledge they might have possessed of it, as a person would be distinguished at the present day for speaking and writing four or five languages correctly.

Why a knowledge was at that time the privilege of but a few, we shall make a passing remark elsewhere in the course of this paper. For the present we shall adduce here another instance of one of the foremost men of science of modern times, of whom it has been truly said, that *he did credit* to the Royal Institution to which he belonged, and who in the midst of his laborious and fruitful researches into physical science, was, according to his own statement, ever assiduously careful of the improvement of his mind; and this mainly through the instrumentality and scrupulous

attention to language. We allude, of course, to Dr. Faraday.

In a most able lecture on *Mental Education*, the learned lecturer, after tacitly admitting the fact that, though our instructors may do much for us in the unfolding of our mental faculties, still all that really refers to the development of the intellect must be brought about by *Self-training*. He complains that, generally speaking, "mankind are willing to leave the faculties which relate to judgment almost entirely uneducated, and their decisions at the mercy of ignorance, prepossessions, the passions, or even accident." He warmly urges that, in order to encompass the great object of *self-education* to be *effected* in after-life, "we should accustom ourselves to clear and definite language, especially in physical matters, giving to a word its true and full, but measured meaning, that we may be able to convey our ideas clearly to the minds of others. Two persons cannot mutually impart their knowledge, or compare or rectify their conclusions, unless they attend to the true intent and force of language. If by such words as *attraction*, *electricity*, *polarity*, or *atom*, they imply different things, they may discuss facts,

deny results, and doubt consequences for an indefinite time without any advantageous progress. I hold it as a great point of *self-education*, that the student should be continually engaged in forming exact ideas, and in expressing them clearly by language." And farther on he says : " It is an extraordinary thing that man, with a mind so wonderful that there is nothing to compare with it in the known creation, should leave it to run wild in respect of its highest elements and qualities. He has a power of comparison and judgment by which his final resolves, and all those acts of his material system which distinguish him from the brutes, are guided. Shall he omit to educate and improve them when education can do much? Is it towards the very principles and privileges that distinguish him from other creatures he should feel indifference? *To those who reflect upon the many hours and days devoted by a lover of sweet sounds to gain a moderate facility upon a mere mechanical instrument it ought to bring a correcting blush of shame if they feel convicted of neglecting the beautiful living instrument, wherein play all the powers of the mind.*"\*

\* FARADAY—On Mental Education.

Far be it from us to depreciate, in the slightest degree, the cultivation of music, which the writer here evidently alludes to; quite the contrary: no other art indeed is so thorough and complete a boon to all classes of society. *Other arts require education before they can be enjoyed.* Sculpture, for instance, is a delight for the higher and better educated classes, whilst it will be more or less unintelligible, and therefore uninteresting, to the labourer and handicraftsman. Music, however, appeals directly to every class; the soldier, the sailor, the ploughman, the schoolboy—each and all delight in music. There are moments in life in which its enrapturing strains fall as heavenly dew upon the wearied mind, and lift it above its earthly cares, thereby giving us a foretaste of a better world; and we candidly think that we run no risk of incurring the anathema of the great poet, who says:

The man that hath no music in himself,  
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,  
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils;

\* \* \* \* \*

Let no such man be trusted.

MERCHANT OF VENICE

## CHAPTER III.

Archbishop Trench on the study of words—Whewell on Language  
—Analysis of language indispensable in psychological research  
—Leibnitz's remarks in this connection—Bonald on metaphysical speculations—Importance of the mother-tongue in the culture of the intellectual faculties—Quotations from Grimm and Schlegel in support.

Though much has already been said upon the study of language, yet we shall present our readers with the following quotations, bearing, as they all do, forcibly on the subject in question.

“A language will often be wiser, not merely than the vulgar, but even than the wisest who speak it. Being like amber in its efficacy to circulate the electric spirit of truth, it is also like amber in embalming and preserving the relics of ancient wisdom, although one is not seldom puzzled to decipher its contents. Sometimes it locks up truths which were once well known, but which in the course of ages

have passed out of sight and been forgotten. In another case it holds the germs of truths, of which, though they were never plainly discerned, the genius of its framers caught a glimpse in a happy moment of divination. A meditative man cannot refrain from wonder when he digs down to the deep thought lying at the root of many a metaphorical term, employed for the designation of spiritual things, even of those with regard to which professing philosophers have blundered grossly; and often it would seem as though rays of truths, which were still below the intellectual horizon, had dawned upon the imagination as it was looking up to heaven. Hence they who feel an inward call to teach and enlighten their countrymen should deem it an important part of their duty to draw out the stores of thought which are already latent in their native language, to purify it from the corruptions which time brings upon all things, and from which language has no exemption, and to endeavour to give distinctness and precision to whatever in it is confused, or obscure, or dimly seen.”\*

“I would urge on you how well it would

\* Guesses at Truth, 1st Series, p. 334.

repay you to study the words which you are in the habit of using or of meeting, be they such as relate to the highest spiritual things, or our common words of the shop and the market, and all the familiar course of life. It will indeed repay you far better than you can easily believe. I am sure, at least, that for many a young man his first discovery of the fact that words are living powers, has been like dropping scales from his eyes, like the acquiring of another sense, or the introduction into a new world ; he is never able to cease wondering at the moral marvels that surround him on every side, and ever reveal themselves more and more to his gaze." \*

We shall, in its proper place, give a few examples of what the writer here refers to ; meanwhile we shall proceed with our last quotation.

"Language is often called an instrument of thought, but it is also the nutriment of thought ; or, rather, it is the atmosphere in which thought lives ; a medium essential to the activity of our speculative powers, although invisible and imperceptible in its operation, and an element

\* TRENCH—Study of Words, p. 1.

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modifying, by its qualities and changes, the growth and complexion of the facilities which it feeds. In this way the influence of preceding discoveries upon subsequent ones, of the past upon the present, is most penetrating and universal, although most subtle and difficult to trace. The most familiar words are connected by imperceptible ties with the reasonings and discoveries of former men and distant times. Their knowledge is an inseparable part of ours; the present generation inherits and uses the scientific wealth of all the past. And this is the fortune not only of the great and rich in the intellectual world, of those who have the key to the ancient store-houses, and who have accumulated treasures of their own; but the humblest inquirer, while he puts his reasonings into the words, benefits by the labours of the greatest. When he counts his little wealth he finds he has coins which bear the image and superscription of ancient and modern intellectual dynasties, and that in virtue of this possession acquisitions are in his power, solid knowledge within his reach, which none could ever have attained to, if it were not that the gold of truth once dug out of the mine

circulates more and more widely among mankind." \*

The foregoing quotations require no comment ; they speak volumes of themselves ; we will only remark, that without the analysis of language, no clear insight or knowledge of the mind can ever be attained ; whereas through it we shall afford full scope and play to the exercise of the understanding. Leibnitz is exceedingly explicit on this head : " I verily believe," says he, " that languages are the best mirror of the human mind, and that an exact analysis of the signification of words would make us better acquainted than anything else with the workings of the understanding." May we not, then, after so many weighty authorities, be warranted to affirm that, if properly conducted, the discipline of the intellectual faculties, may be, to a very great extent, *mainly* carried on through language ? We think we may ; at any rate, it will be far more helpful to us through life—which, after all, is the great end of every education—than all the brainspun metaphysics set forth by the various sects of philosophers for these last two thousand years. M. Bonald, an

\* WHEWHELL—The Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences.

able metaphysician himself, makes the following remark upon these abstruse and mystical speculations of the mind: "The diversity of doctrines has increased from age to age, with the number of masters, and with the progress of knowledge; and Europe, which at present possesses libraries filled with philosophical works, and which reckons up almost as many philosophers and writers; poor in the midst of so much riches, and uncertain, with the aid of all its guides, which road it should follow; Europe, the centre and focus of all the lights of the world, has yet its *philosophy* only in expectation." \*

It may naturally be asked here, "In what language is this mental drill, this unfolding of the faculties to be carried on?" The answer is as simple as the question: In one's own; no matter what that may be, or whatever advantage any one particular language may have over another; and this for the sole reason of its being the one in which we naturally think, of its being a part of our individual self, and which, consequently, could no more be replaced by any other, whatever efforts might be employed for

\* *Recherches Philosophiques*, p. 1.

that purpose, than if we attempted to change the turn of our features. This particular tongue, so appropriately called, both in English and German respectively, *mother-tongue* and *Muttersprache*, "the ancient Romans," says Heyse, "called *patrius sermo*, *patria lingua*, which properly signified language of the country (*vaterländische*), not paternal (*väterliche*)."\* Nor had the Greek a word corresponding to the term *mother-tongue*. Both in English and German the word expresses our natural connection with the language which is closely entwined with ourselves, imbibed with our maternal milk, and intimately connected with our very being, growing with our growth, and strengthening with our strength. In virtue of this we become members of the human race, of our family, and consequently of the nation of which we form a part, and as such we feel that we have our being. Hence that unspeakable pleasure that takes possession of us when, far from our native country, we happen to hear our own language spoken, and still more so if it is the dialect of our birth-place. We feel as if a part of ourselves

\* System der Sprachwissenschaft.

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were entering into our being from without. William Humboldt, with a true feeling on this subject, remarks in one of his letters: "Our real native country is our language; it is through our language, much more than by any other means, that we lose the sentiment of our nationality."

No other language which is learnt in after-life takes such deep root in our minds as our mother-tongue; this is, and remains, the natural organ of our dearest thoughts, the immediate expression of our innermost life, which prevails over our whole being, a living and creative force. On the other hand, every foreign language is for us a mere external means of communication, which becomes proportionably the more inadequate for the expression of our ideas, the more original and far-fetched are the thoughts we have to express. For the same reason also is the language of a people inseparably connected with its national sentiment. A nation will give up everything rather than its language; this, being the common organ of the national conscience, becomes for the people the vital element of its intellect; it is therefore its most sacred property, by

which its very nationality must either stand or fall.\*

As a man's own tongue, then, is the channel through which his intellectual acquirements are to be made, he should spare no trouble to gain as wide and thorough a knowledge of it as possible. The study of a foreign language, when the nicer shades and delicacies are not aimed at, is a matter of almost a given time ; † but the study of one's mother-tongue is a question of one's whole life. Language may be considered, at one and the same time, both easy and difficult to acquire. It is easy in so far as the peculiarities of language are engrafted on our minds and assimilated with ourselves, in almost their endless variety as easily as our

\* HEYSE—System der Sprachwissenschaft.

† “There appears to be a widespread opinion, which has become almost an axiom, that the British ability for the acquisition of a foreign idiom is inferior to that of other nations, but . . . has convinced the present writer that this has no foundation in fact, and that his countrymen are at least as capable of learning to speak and write any other tongue as correctly and in as short a period of time, as most Europeans. The Briton's proverbial reserve and his aversion to possible ridicule have probably engendered this erroneous opinion and whereas a German or Frenchman, say, does not hesitate to put his knowledge to account as soon as he knows a few words, the Englishman prefers to make sure of his ground before attempting to converse, lest he should provoke derision.”—WEINTZ—Preface to *Spanish Principia*.

gestures or manners, whose variety is also infinite ; yet, as Jacob Grimm remarks in his *Essay on the Origin of Language*—"How difficult it is to master a language thoroughly, how hard to sift it through all its details! The greater part of men possess but the half, nay, only a very insignificant part of the vocabulary of their own tongue." A single instance may suffice to convince us of the truth of this assertion. According to the most competent judges, the vocabulary of English may be held to be one of the most extensive of living languages. As to the exact number of words opinions differ ; some contend for a hundred thousand, others for less, and others again for more. Now, to be perfectly acquainted with so vast a multitude of words, together with their numberless acceptations, would be beyond the reach of the most powerful mind. This, however, need discourage no one, for we are assured on good authority, that the vocabulary of a well-educated person of any country, hardly ever exceeds ten thousand words. The fact, however, is important in itself, as it shows what a herculean task it would be for him who would make the attempt to get any given vocabulary by heart,

as some have foolishly attempted to do ; but it is of the utmost importance for a man to enrich his vocabulary, as far as it lies in his power, were it only for all practical purposes.

A man should revere and hallow his own language as his greatest earthly boon ; as that in which he sees his mind and thoughts *reflected*, as he sees his corporeal self reflected in a glass. He who sincerely loves his native tongue will make it a rule, not only to speak and write it correctly on all occasions, but will also endeavour to prevent its being corrupted by his fellow-countrymen. "A nation," says Schlegel, "whose language becomes rude and barbarous must be on the brink of barbarism in regard to everything else. A nation which allows her language to go to ruin is parting with the last half of her intellectual independence, and testifies her willingness to cease to exist."

This natural affection for our own language, however, should not bias us against other languages ; it is only the half-educated and unthinking who consider their language the one *par excellence* ; such, therefore, are prone and apt to slight those of other countries. As in

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our moral nature an overweening opinion of ourselves is a stumbling-block to our moral advancement, so an undue prepossession in favour of our own language will ever prove an impediment to our progress, by damping that certain degree of warmth and earnestness so essential to the study of a foreign tongue.

## CHAPTER IV.

Decadence of faith in the indispensability of classical study—Locke on youthful education—Dr. Latham on the classical languages—Comparison therewith of French, Italian, etc.,—Individuality of modern literature—Inducements to the study of Latin and Greek—Benjamin Franklin's testimony.

The time is fast passing away when the notion was prevalent that no true foundation could be laid to learning but through the two classical languages—Latin and Greek. This creed—for such it was with our single-minded forefathers—no one dared to gainsay, either to avoid passing for a dunce, or, what is as likely, from sheer incapacity of seeing into the real state of the case. The *traditional* superiority of these languages may very well have stood their ground, and made head against every other at a time when the whole *scibilis* or body of learning was limited to the *trivium* and *quadrivium*, a course of seven sciences, of

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which little or nothing was taught but the names; at a time when men were vainly endeavouring to write like Cicero and Livy, and versify in the language of Virgil and Horace. Unfortunately there are many who still cling to this exploded system, men who would fain "train up youth as if they had been born to walk the streets of Athens and Rome," whereas the true and ultimate end of all education should be what Locke so earnestly recommends to parents, "that their childrens time should be spent in acquiring what may be useful to them when they come to be men." But such men who believe, or rather would impose the belief upon others, that there can be no real learning without the two dead languages, either misconstrue, or are purblind to, an all-convincing truth which they must have read and repeated a thousand times, that *tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis*. We unfeignedly admit that to the man of letters an acquaintance with these languages cannot but be of the utmost value; and for those who have no particular calling, whom fortune has smiled on with her worldly favours, let these, by all means, indulge in this intellectual

luxury, not to the exclusion, however, of their own tongue.

Lest we should be deemed to have taken but a one-sided view on so important a question, we shall quote a few lines from Dr. Latham, himself no mean classical scholar ; his opinion, therefore, will only give the greater weight to the subject under consideration. “The partiality which our forefathers, at the revival of letters in Europe, naturally entertained for the Greek and Roman languages, made them look upon every distinguishing peculiarity belonging to them as *one* of the many causes of the amazing superiority which those languages evidently enjoyed above every other at that time spoken in Europe. This blind deference still continues to be paid to them, as our minds are early prepossessed with these ideas, and as we are taught in our earliest infancy to believe, that *to entertain the least idea of our own language being equal to the Greek or Latin in any particular whatever* would be a certain mark of ignorance or want of taste. Their rights, therefore, like those of the Church in former ages, remain still to be examined ; and we, without exerting our reason

to discover truth from falsehood, tamely sit down satisfied with the idea of their undoubted pre-eminence in every respect. But if we look around us for a moment, and observe the many excellent productions which are to be met with in almost every language of Europe, we must be satisfied that even these are now possessed of some powers which might afford at least a presumption that if they were cultivated with a proper degree of attention they might, in *some respects*, be made to *rival*, if not to excel, those beautiful productions and justly admired remains of antiquity."

The same writer elsewhere has words to the following effect: "Whatever may be the interpretation of the relative value of one language above another, the fact cannot be denied, that such languages as the English, French, and Italian, etc., are more advanced, grown, or developed, than the classical tongues." Now if, coupled with this statement, we add that of our being in possession of the mental labours of many preceding ages, together with what the classical writers themselves have bequeathed to posterity; that we possess works upon sciences unknown to, nay, not even dreamt of

by them, in those remote times—works that stand in the foremost ranks both for subject-matter and style—the conclusion cannot be avoided, that, being so favourably placed, we are far richer in intellectual wealth than our predecessors; and we think that what has been pronounced by competent judges, more particularly of the English language, “that it now possess a literature which, for depth and sublimity, as well as copiousness and variety, greatly surpasses either of the ancient languages” will apply equally with several at least, of the modern languages of Europe. Over and above the advantages of the living to the dead languages, there is another which must always preponderate with the *many*—that they will ever prefer writers of their own times to those of an older date; writers with whose lives and doings they are but darkly acquainted and in whose works they can consequently feel little or no interest. To take a solitary example: Who reads—or, indeed who knows—anything about Petrarca’s Latin poem on *Africa*? Yet the poet fancied he had been writing it for posterity, for his critics inform us that upon that very work he had founded his

future fame. But, "*happily*, his muse ventured to confide his misfortunes to the vulgar tongue," and by so doing his memory still dwells with us in his immortal *Canzoniere*.

Without harbouring the slightest disparagement or prejudice against the worth and intrinsic value of the ancient writers, we have already said, and maintain that, with very few exceptions, they will always give way to such writers in English as Shakespeare, Milton, Bacon, Hume, Macaulay, without mentioning scientific writers such as Brewster, Faraday, etc.; in French, Montaigne, Corneille, Bossuet, Molière, Pascal, Fénelon, Rousseau, Voltaire, and Chateaubriand; in German, as Lessing, Goethe, Richter, and Schiller; in Italian, Dante, Ariosto, Tasso, Macchiavelli, etc.

And here we cannot resist the temptation of quoting a short paragraph from a late number in the *Westminster Review*, as it aptly falls in upon the question in point. "Modern literature," says the eloquent writer, "is not a mere copy of the ancients; it has a stamp and flavour of its own; in the multiform and ever-changing phases of our social state it has assumed a corresponding diversity and flexibility; and

while the ancient literatures are now fixed and limited, the modern are ever progressive, becoming more abundant and more various with lapsing years. The former are as a lake, beautiful, but motionless and unchanging; the latter are as a river which swells, as it advances, fed by innumerable tributaries, rolls on in ever more majestic volume. The spirit of the old has permeated our modern literatures, and can never perish, even were we to cease from its study. But neglect of the new cuts us off from the ever-flowing stream of contemporaneous thought and life, fed, too, as it is, from distant fountains in the ancient hills."

From the foregoing remarks, on giving to modern languages precedence to the ancient, it might be inferred that we are for laying the study of the dead languages aside altogether; if any such inference will have been drawn, we hasten to correct it, by observing that, Greek and Latin—the latter in a far greater degree—cannot reasonably be dispensed with in all cases indiscriminately, but that regard must be had to the relation in which these languages stand to the mother-tongue. According to the present condition of the English language, upwards of

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thirty per cent. of the vocabulary actually used by the best authors is derived from Latin; "and the proportion is still greater," says Archbishop Trench, "if we analyze the columns of our English dictionaries, where the words are what is called *at rest*." It follows, then, that if an Englishman is to get a thorough knowledge of his own language he must either have recourse to the study of Latin, or be satisfied with making use of words which must often be actually meaningless to him. Many ingenious methods have been devised to meet this inherent difficulty of the language, in the form of Exercise-books on Etymology, hoping through them to dispense with the immediate study of Latin. But, however praiseworthy some of these works actually are, they must necessarily fall far short of their object; for every possible explanation in the world will never bring the full sense of a word, with all its bearings, home to the mind so clearly as when studied in the works themselves. A single example from one of the works here referred to may suffice to show how fallacious are all such attempts. Supposing a pupil were called upon to explain the adjective *ambient* in the sentence,

*The ambient air is filled with life*, he is taught to answer that *ambient* is from *Eo*, I go, and the prefix *am* or *ambi*, around, about, which verb may also be combined with other prefixes, as *ab*, *ad*, *ante*, *circum*, *con*, *ob*, *prae*; the past participle is *itum*, gone; that is, to go about, to encompass, to environ; its corresponding substantive is *ambitio*—literally, a going about, and figuratively—a desire of honour and preferment.

Nothing is, nor indeed can be said, without knowing the accident of the Latin Grammar—of the termination *ent* as an inflection of the participle adjective *iens ientis*, whose infinitive is *ire*. What time and trouble it would require a pupil to grasp and retain all this we shall leave to others to conjecture; for ourselves we think it is a mere racking of the brain without any probable result.

Again, if we turn to our dictionaries for the definition of a Latin word, we meet with the same difficulty. Let us take a word almost at random, say *adventitious*. According to Latin this means, *accidental*, *supervenient*, *extrinsically added*, *not essentially inherent*; according to Webster: *added extrinsically*, *accidental*, *not*

*essentially inherent, casual, foreign* ; here, with the single exception of the negative *not*, the whole definition is Latin throughout.\* In vain would a person unacquainted with that language make anything of it ; of course a guess or a scramble at the meaning might be made from the context, but the impression left on the mind must be faint indeed. The fact is, the English language being so much indebted to the Romans for a great part of its vocabulary, a knowledge of that language is essential to an Englishman desirous of knowing his own ; now the safest and most satisfactory method of coming at that knowledge will be by studying the language itself, howsoever imperfect the result of that study may be ; “to know a thing,” says Max Müller, “is better than to know *about* it ; to have seen and handled a book is better than to have read of it.”

How stands the question with other languages—say the Neo-Latin ? Totally different. With them there is every plausible reason for postponing the study of Latin (if it should be

\* The word *foreign* comes to us through the Norman-French word *forain*, and this from the Latin *foris*, without, abroad, out of doors.

required at all) to that of modern languages. The word *ambient*, for instance, is common to the French, Spanish and Italian, and the above-mentioned phrase might be translated literally into Fr. *L'air ambiente est remplie de vie* ; Sp. *El aire ambiente es llena de vida* ; It. *L'aria ambiente è piena di vita*. Such like words are perfectly intelligible to the natives of these respective languages, without having recourse to Latin for the meaning of them ; and thousands of others, from the same source, which make Englishmen hesitate as to their meaning, cause not a shadow of doubt to a Frenchman, a Spaniard, or an Italian.\*

On this point, B. Franklin—one of the greatest practical philosophers that ever lived—has left us in his autobiography a few remarks worth recording. “I have mentioned,” says he, “that I had only one year’s instruction

\* Latin is one of the easiest languages for Italians to acquire.—The very meaning of their adjective *Latino, chiaro, facile, intelligibile*, almost proves it. From this also some popular expressions are derived, as *latino di bocca*, a person apt to speak ill of others. The word is sometimes written *ladino* : as *latino* (or, *ladino*) *di mano*, handy, ready, to use one’s fists (or, vulgarly, one’s fives).

So, in Spanish, *ladino* is to be fluent in speech or in various tongues.

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in a Latin school, and that when very young, after which I neglected that language entirely. But, when I had attained an acquaintance with the French, Italian, and Spanish, I was surprised to find, on looking over a Latin Testament, that I understood more of that language than I had imagined, which encouraged me to apply myself again to the study of it, and I met with more success, as these preceding languages had greatly smoothed my way."

## CHAPTER V.

Transpositive and Analogous Languages—Their classification—Their merits and demerits—Locke on the desiderata of a language—Crombie's remarks on the pre-eminence of the Analogous—De Quincey on Kant's style.

Although the ultimate end of all languages is that of conveying the ideas of one man to another, yet no two languages exactly agree in the mode or form of expressing those ideas. This diversity of language is generally known by the terms, idiom, phrase, phraseology, genius, or peculiar cast of language. Over and above these several distinctions, some languages are remarkable for the easy and natural flow of their words ; others appear to be more grave and majestic ; others again solemn, high-sounding and declamatory ; and, for distinction's sake, languages have been properly divided into the so-called *transpositive* and *analogous*, or, in other terms, the *rhetorical* and (though erroneously) the *natural* order. Under the

head transpositive are referred those languages which follow no other order in their construction than the taste or turn of mind of the speaker or writer may deem most convenient for his purpose, it being all but optional with him to place the subject or predicate—and to a certain degree the same holds with the other parts of speech—at the beginning or end of the sentence, or whatever part of it, as may hit his fancy, provided always his object be obtained—that of convincing his hearers. To this transpositive order properly belong the Greek and Latin languages. If to this arbitrary construction, this freedom from the trammels of rules, are added the solemn dignity, the stateliness of movement, the full-toned and highly euphonious character of these tongues—qualities eminently fitted both for the highest flights of poetry, and for all the requirements of declamation—it will be readily admitted that the ancient languages do possess some advantages which the modern cannot boast of.

Such languages, on the other hand, as follow what is commonly called the natural order, are classed among the *analogous*. Of this kind are the English, French, Italian (the latter in a less

degree) and most other European languages. This order of nature consists in placing (as is well known) the subject or nominative first in the sentence, then the verb, with its adjuncts—if any, and lastly the object. On contrasting this extremely simple arrangement with the artificial order of the transpositive languages, we might, for a moment, be led to decide in favour of the latter; but after a moment's reflection on the great aim of all language, we shall find that this very simplicity of structure must of itself give the analogous an immense superiority over the transpositive languages: for while the latter move on, in their undisturbed gravity, the former advance with that youthful vigour and buoyancy which so eminently fit them for all the transactions of life, and for that rapid interchange of thought between man and man.\* And though the transpositive languages may bear the palm for stateliness and variety of

\* This rapid transmission of our ideas is comprised in Locke's definition of the use of language: "The ends," he says, "of language, in our discourse with others, being chiefly three: first, to make known one man's thoughts or ideas to another; secondly, *to do so with as much ease and quickness as possible*; and thirdly, thereby to convey the knowledge of things."—LOCKE—*Essay on the Human Understanding*. Book III., Ch. X.

phrase, the “analogous will claim the pre-eminence in preciseness of expression, diversity of sound, and facility of communication.” \*

Again, it may be objected that the strictly grammatical order in analogous languages, is not always the most appropriate for rhetorical effect ; but this order, as is well known, is widely departed from in prose of a high order, and still more so in poetry ; so much so indeed, that in some languages, English and Italian for instance, the order of words, on many occasions, is inverted almost as entirely as in the transpositive languages themselves.

Or, it might also be argued that the flexional character of a transpositive must, of itself, invariably possess advantages over an uninflected language. The following example, brought forward almost at random, would, however, we think, prove the contrary : *Misereberis ejus, sed animam pro anima, oculum pro oculo, dentem pro dente, pedem pro pede exiges.*† On comparing this with the English version : “Thine eye shall not pity ; but *life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand,*”

\* D. CROMBIE—Grammar.

† De. XX., v. 24.

we are at once struck with the pithy raciness of the uninflected English, contrasted with the laborious case endings of the Latin. Nor can we forbear remarking the incongruity, at least in such a passage as the present, of the noun—the very name of the thing—changing its form barely on account of the preposition requiring that case; so that the real names of the objects *anima, oculus dens, manus*, and, *pes*, are altogether lost sight of. Dugald Stewart, in quoting Daniel the prophet's words, as Lord Bacon did before him, when speaking of the progress of the Sciences: *Multi pertransibunt et augebitur scientia*, felt dissatisfied with the want of nerve in the Latin expression, for he chooses to add, "or, in the still *more empathetic* words of our English version, 'Many shall go to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.'" But this is anticipating matters.

Midway between the two divisions above mentioned, stands the German, itself at once a transpositive and an analogous language. Its power of transposition, however, is not altogether left to caprice, but is governed by certain particles and other parts of speech, which require that such and such grammatical inversions

should on all occasions be closely attended to. But many of the best German writers—or rather most profound thinkers—indulge, to an almost incredible degree, in long-winded phraseology, to such an extent, in fact, that it has been pointedly said of them, that “they keep a sort of circumlocution office;” and De Quincey’s remark on Kant’s style is as witty as it is as true: “Kant was a great man,” says he, “but he was obtuse and deaf as an antediluvian boulder with regard to language and its capacities. He has sentences which have been measured by a carpenter, and some of them run two feet eight by six inches. Such a sentence with that enormous span is only fit for the use of a megatherium or a pre-Adamite.”

Another peculiar feature of the German worth mentioning is the facility with which—after the Greek fashion—it compounds its words; instance the following: *Die Reichs-generalfeldmareschalllieutenantstelle*, the rank of a lieutenant field-marshal of the kingdom; or the untranslatable word combined by Voss, *Morgendammerungshändelmacherrechtsverbmuchwanderung*.

The German language has beauties quite

peculiar to itself, over and above its possessing an almost boundless flexibility of derivation, and composition, which, on this point, renders it second to the Greek alone; and by its ever increasing influence on literature and philosophy it has become invaluable to the man of science and letters.

## CHAPTER VI.

Derivative or Composite Languages—Fallacies with regard to their inferiority—Max Müller on literary dialects—Schlegel and Blair in favour of derivative languages—Grimm on the excellencies of the English tongue—English onomatopœias—Illustrations thereof from Dryden and Milton.

There is a very prevalent opinion with regard to modern languages, and one which is held almost as an established principle, that derivative, or, composite languages must necessarily fall short of and be inferior to the languages from which they are derived; or, in other words, it is taken for granted, the sister languages—French, Italian, and Spanish—can in no wise compete with Latin, their common mother; and that English must, of course, stand many degrees lower than the Saxon, Danish and Norman, to which languages, it is so largely, if not altogether, indebted for what it actually is. Such an assertion, however, is made without book, and to admit it would be to admit that

the world has been at a standstill, to say the least, ever since the ancient languages ceased to be spoken. Those, however, who view languages in their true light, and compare the past with the present, argue otherwise. What says one of the ablest of them—Max Müller: “After having been established as the language of legislation, religion, literature, and general civilization, the classical Latin dialect became stationary and stagnant. It could not grow because it was not allowed to change or deviate from its classical correctness. It was haunted by its own ghost. Literary dialects, or what are commonly called classical languages, pay for their temporary greatness by inevitable decay. They are like stagnant lakes at the side of great rivers, they form reservoirs of what was once living and running speech, but they are no longer carried on by the main current. At times it may seem as if the whole stream of language was absorbed by these lakes, and we can hardly trace the small rivulets which run on the main bed. But if lower down, that is to say, later in history, we meet again with a new body of stationary language, forming or formed, we may be sure that its tributaries were those

very rivulets, which for a time were almost lost from our sight. Or it may be more accurate to compare a classical or literary idiom with the frozen surface of a river, brilliant and smooth, but stiff and cold." \*

Though we do not blindly endorse the statements or opinions of others, especially in linguistic science—which, by the way, being yet in her leading strings, must be cautiously dealt with—yet we do so most unfeignedly with F. von Schlegel and D. Blair, who, though treating the subject differently, are so perfectly at one with regard to the merits of derivative and composite languages, that we shall make no apology for giving their views of the question, and that with but slight deviation from their words.

Not even the historical prerogative of a high antiquity, says the former, no, nor even the merit of having preserved a primary form in greatest purity, however valuable a quality, is the sole standard of excellence in a language, nor that alone which determines its perfection. The English language affords a ready illustration of our remark. To it, beyond all others, the designation of being a mixed language

\* Science of Language.

applies ; indeed it corresponds altogether to this character. It furnishes, at the same time, a striking proof of the height of excellence which even a mixed language is capable of attaining, meeting, as it does, all the requisitions of a solemn and nervous poetry, the earnest appeals of eloquence, and the calm flow of descriptive prose. And yet, on analysis, it presents to the grammatical eye the somewhat heterogeneous compound of two wholly different elements, whose originally chaotic mixture has been reduced into a rare and happy proportion.

The disadvantages,—if indeed they may be called such—arising from the influx of so many streams, are counterbalanced by other advantages attending it, particularly by the number and variety of words with which such a language is likely to be enriched. Few languages are, in fact, more copious than the English. On all grave subjects, especially historical, critical, political, and moral, no writer will fail to find abundant materials wherewith to work out his subject. We are rich, too, in the language of poetry. Our poetical style differs widely from prose, not in point of numbers only, but in the very words themselves ; which shows what a

stock and compass of words lie at our disposal, and suited to those different occasions.

If further proofs were wanting to show to what height of excellence a mixed language may attain, we could not appeal to a more competent tribunal than to the great German scholar Jacob Grimm. Though a passionate lover of his own tongue, this eminent philologist does not hesitate to award the palm of excellence to the most composite of living tongues. "Of all modern languages," says he, "none has gained such strength and manliness as the English language, and this mainly by throwing aside the ancient rules, and retaining but few of its inflections. The quantity of its intermediate vowel sounds, the pronunciation of which may be learnt but cannot be taught, gives this language a power of expression never before possessed by any human speech. Its highly spiritual genius, and wonderfully happy development and condition, have been the result of a surprising intimate union of the two noblest languages of modern Europe—the Teutonic and the Romance. It is well known in what relation these two stand to one another in the English tongue; the former supplying in far larger pro-

portion the material groundwork, the latter the spiritual conceptions. In truth, the English language, which, by no mere accident, has produced and upborne the most predominant poet of modern times, as distinguished from the ancient classical poetry—I can, of course, only mean Shakespeare—may with all right be called a world language ; and, like the English people, appears destined hereafter to prevail with a sway, more extensive even than its present, over all the portions of the globe. For, in wealth, good sense, and closeness of structure no other of the languages at this time spoken deserves to be compared with it—not even our German, which is torn, even as we are torn, and must first rid itself of many defects, before it can enter boldly into the lists as a competitor with the English.” \*

Were we to enumerate the various merits of the English language, we should be imposing on ourselves an endless task : we must therefore rest satisfied with merely pointing out one particular quality, as it is not altogether out of place here. We refer to that particular excel-

\* J. GRIMM.—*Ueber den Ursprung der Sprache*.—Berlin, 1866.  
P. 53.

lence of sound, or *imitative words*, which pervade the whole language. True it is that all languages do possess this peculiarity, but, we are inclined to think, in a somewhat less degree than English. A few of such are : *whizz, buzz, hiss, crash, smash, whistle, rustle*; the *ticking* of a watch, the *tinkling* of a hand-bell, the *clattering* of hoofs, the *booming, roaring, or rumbling* of cannon, the *clanking* of chains, the *harsh grating* and *creaking* of hinges, etc.

In his ode to St. Cecilia's day, Dryden has combined sound and sense together :

O'er all the dreary coasts,  
Dreadful gleams,  
Dismal screams :  
Fires that glow,  
Shrieks of woe,  
Sullen moans,  
Hollow groans,  
And cries of tortured ghosts.

Milton thus describes the opening of the gates of Hell :—

On a sudden, open fly  
With impetuous recoil, and *jarring* sound,  
Th' infernal doors ; and on their hinges  
*Grate harsh* thunder.

How differently does he contrast the opening of Heaven's gates !

Heaven opened wide  
Her *ever-during* gates, *harmonious* sound,  
On *golden* hinges turning.

But to return. We shall again follow our authorities mentioned above upon the derivatory or Neo-Latin languages. These languages, they say, stand next in order to the mixed, and in part also belong to them, and which have rather softened down than abolished the stricter grammatical forms, having rounded them off, as it were, for greater convenience of use, but do not therefore necessarily stand inferior to the mother-tongue in grace and vigour of composition; on the contrary, in respect of style, they are vastly superior to their common parent. Thus the Italian appears softer and more flexible for lyrical verse, and, perhaps, for every creation of the poetic fancy, sweeter and more graceful than its Roman mother-tongue; and by its copiousness, its freedom of arrangement, the great beauty and harmony of its sounds, it suits itself very happily to most subjects, either in prose or poetry; and it seems to be, on the whole, the most perfect of the modern dialects that have arisen out of the ruins of the ancient.

Though we should incur the risk of being

irksome, yet we cannot refrain from adding a most appropriate remark upon the Italian language, made by a most distinguished modern philologist. "The freedom of the Italian syntax is to be ascribed in part to the fact that it is both an aboriginal and, to a great extent, an unmixed tongue, spoken by the descendants of those to whom the maternal Latin was native, and retaining the radical reforms and grammatical capabilities of that language, whereas French and Spanish are strangers to the soil, corrupted by a large infusion of foreign ingredients, and spoken by nations alien in descent from those who employed the common use of both as their mother-tongue." \*

The highly euphonic character of the Italian tongue, made up, as it is, of the very elements of music, needs no illustration here; two or three examples may suffice to show that it also is rich in imitative words:—

Ahi ! quanto, a dir qual era, è cosa dura,  
Questa selva selvaggia, ed aspra e forte,  
Che nel pensier rinnova la paura ! †

\* MARSH.—Lectures on the English Language.

† Ah ! what a painful task to tell how drear,  
How savage, and how rank that forest stood,  
Which e'en to think upon renews my fear !—WRIGHT.

Gli occhi ha vermigli, e la barba unta ed atra  
 E il ventre largo, ed unghiate le mani ;  
 Graffia gli spirti, gli scuoi ed isquatra. \*

Longfellow says the repetition of the sounds *dolente* and *dolore* in the following well-known verses are like the *tolling of a funeral bell*.

Per me si va nella città dolente,  
 Per me si va nell' eterno, dolore,  
 Per me si va tra la perduta gente.†

Our next passage is from Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, and the rendering at foot by Fairfax, which is considered the best version made of this poem into any of the European languages. Though creditably done, these few lines, however, afford a striking example of the sheer impossibility of translating works of imagination and taste, particularly where sound and sense are so closely linked together.

Chiama gli abitator dell' ombre eterne,  
 Il rauco suon della tartarea tromba ;  
 Treman le spaziose atre caverne,  
 E l' aer cieco a quel romor rimbomba ;

\* Red are his eyes, large belly he displays,  
 A black and greasy beard ; with savage claw  
 He seizes on the spirits, tears, and flays.—WRIGHT.

† Through me the way is to the city dolent,  
 Through me the way is to eternal dole ;  
 Through me the way among people lost.—LONGFELLOW.

Nè stridendo così dalle superne  
Regioni del cielo il folgor piomba ;  
Nè sì scossa giammai trema la terra  
Quando i vapori in sen gravida serra.\*

It may also be remarked that in any anadem of poetical beauties that might be culled from English writers, it would be found that a large number were transplanted from Italian soil. Thus Spenser borrowed many of his most entrancing pictures from Tasso ; in the songs of Carew are distinctly re-echoed the harmonious canzonets of Guarini, and Milton exhibits throughout his works his predilection for Italian poetry.

As to French, it is generally known to be the language of society *par excellence*, as it moves with unequalled ease in describing the nicer shades and delicacies of the feelings. "For precision, distinctness of expression," says Schlegel, "its prose has attained an

\* The dreary trumpet blew a dreadful blast,  
And rumbled through the lands and kingdoms under ;  
Through vastness wide it roar'd and hollows vast,  
And fill'd the deep with horror, fear and wonder ;  
Not half so dreadful noise the tempests cast,  
That fall from skies, with storms of hail and thunder.  
Not half so loud the whistling winds do sing,  
Broke from the earthen prisons of their king.

unparalleled height of excellence." Its poetry, however, is far from deserving such praise, as it stands inferior to that of most of the modern languages, though no one can deny it a prominent place for expressing the witty and playful turns of the fancy.

There is no lack in French of a good many onomatopœias, or, as we have already said, imitative words, but these are mostly of a colloquial or familiar kind ; as *babiller*, *barbotter*, *brouhaha*, *chuchotter*, *claquement*, *croquant*, *glou-glou*, *grincement*, *hisser*, *patatras*, *racler*, *rata-plan*, *ronflement*, *tracasser*, *zigzag*, etc.

Français, Anglais, Lorrains, que la fureur assemble,  
Avançaient, combataient, frappaient, mouraient ensemble.\*

Spanish also, as a derivative language, is compounded of the most heterogeneous elements ; for not only is it probable that the Gothic-German admixture is even greater in this than in any other of the Romance dialects, which sprung out of the Latin ; but the Arabic also forms a very considerable element in it. Spanish is praised for the excellence of its prose, as admirably suited for the dignity of

\* VOLTAIRE.

serious narrative, or for the ingenious play of wit ; it is a soft yet majestic language, that falls like martial music on the ear and a literature rich in the attractive love of poetry, and fiction.\* A couple of specimens may suffice to confirm this opinion :—

“La libertad, Sancho, es uno de los mas preciosos dones que á los hombres dieron los cielos ; con ella no pueden igualarse los tesoros que encierra la tierra, ni el mar encubre ; por la libertad, asi, como por la honra, se puede, y debe aventurar la vida.”—CERVANTES.†

The following stanza by Moratin describing a gust of wind through the Escorial,—whose unsheltered site exposes it to every blast,—is highly imitative :—

Como cuando en la octava maravilla  
Del grande Escorial tan celebrado,  
Se mueve el coro donde el arte brilla  
A impulsos de haraon desenfrenado ;  
Tiembla el panteon y altissima capilla  
Y estupendo cimborio agigantado :

\* LONGFELLOW.—Travels in Spain.

† Liberty, O Sancho, is one of the most precious gifts which heaven imparted to mankind ; with it, not all the treasures contained in the bowels of the earth, or hidden in the depths of the sea can be compared ; for liberty as well as for honour, life may, and ought to be risked.

Por los claustros bramando el aire zumba  
Y el portico magnifico retumba.\*

We would fain bring this short outline on modern languages to a close, without attempting the least comparison of the peculiar excellences or defects of any one of them in particular, lest we should incur the charge of partiality to our own—a fault we have already hinted at, and one we carefully wish to avoid—but the opinions of a master intellect—we mean Dugald Stewart—fall in so appropriately with the point under consideration, that we cannot do better than allow this distinguished writer to speak in his own words. “A sensible change has of late taken place in the style of English composition. The number of idiomatical phrases has been abridged, and the language has assumed a form more systematic, precise, and luminous. The transitions too, in our best authors, have become more logical, and less dependent on fanciful or verbal associations. If by these means our

\* As when in that eighth wonder of the world, that Escorial so famous, the choir, where the prodigies of art shine, is shaken by the impulse of a violent hurricane, the pantheon and lofty chapel, and stupendous and gigantic dome tremble, the wind whistles and roars through the cloister, and the magnificent portico re-echoes the sound.

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native tongue has been rendered more unfit for some of the lighter species of writing, it has certainly gained immensely as a vehicle of knowledge." May I not also add, that the study of it has been greatly facilitated to foreigners ; and that in proportion to its rejection of colloquial anomalies, more durable materials are supplied to the present generation for transmitting their intellectual acquisitions to posterity? We ourselves by all means side with a distinguished Italian, whom we have more than once referred to in these pages, that "no language is originally either elegant or barbarous, none fully or absolutely superior to another, for they all have their birth in the same way. . . . So that the contentions about the priority of languages, the partiality whether for our own, the ancient, or for foreign tongues, may be termed sheer pedantic vanity. Philosophy compares and profits, prejudice excludes and censures."\*

\* M. CESAROTTI—*Filosofia delle lingue*.

## CHAPTER VII.

Nature and history of words—Coleridge and Max Müller thereon—Metaphor—Examples thereof—Decay and death of words—Changes in meaning—Changes in form—Guizot's theory—Dean Swift's facetious derivations.

In the foregoing slight sketch we have endeavoured to point out the nature and value of derivatory and mixed languages, and also to prove how superior they are in many respects to the languages from which they are derived. It has been seen that though each possesses some distinct quality peculiar to itself, yet they all belong to the class of highly cultivated languages, and each—we need not be told—is in possession of a literature which alone ought to be an incentive to the study of them. But what, in the present instance, we would most particularly call attention to, is not so much to the higher branches of æsthetics of these languages as to the consideration of the *nature* and *history of words* of them all. To some of

our readers this may appear startling, if not puerile ; but those who have made it a subject of reflection think “ there are cases in which more knowledge of more value may be conveyed by the history of a word than by the history of a campaign.” \* “ The study of words,” says one of the ablest philologists of the present day “ may be tedious to the school-boy as breaking stones is to the wayside labourer ; but to the thoughtful eye of the geologist, these stones are full of interest ; he sees miracles on the high road, and reads chronicles in every ditch. Language, too, has marvels of her own which she unveils to the inquiring glance of the patient student. There are chronicles below her surface ; there are sermons in every word.” †

A few examples may serve to help out our meaning. First, it is well known, as Emerson says—to whom we are indebted for the present observation—that every word which is used to express a moral or intellectual fact, if traced to its origin, is found to be borrowed from some material appearance. *Right*, for instance, originally means *straight* ; *wrong* means *twisted* ;

\* COLERIDGE.—Aids to Reflections.

† MAX MULLER.—Lectures.

*spirit* primarily means *wind* ; *supercilious*, the *raising of the eyebrow*. We say the *heart* to express *emotion*, the *head* to denote *thought* ; and *thought* and *emotion* are, in their turn, words borrowed from sensible things, and now appropriated to spiritual nature. . . . Again every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind ; and that state of the mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture. An enraged man is a *lion* ; a cunning man is a *fox* ; a firm man is a *rock* ; a learned man is a *torch*. A lamb is *innocence* ; a snake is *subtle spite* ; flowers express to us the *delicate affections*. Light and darkness are our familiar expressions for *knowledge* and *ignorance* ; and *heat* for *love*, etc., etc. In like manner, the *memorable* words of history, and the proverbs of nations, consist of a natural fact, selected as a picture of a moral truth. Thus, *a rolling stone gathers no moss* ; *a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush* ; *the last ounce broke the camel's back*, etc., etc.

This spiritual import of words is common to all languages, as the mental operations of men are everywhere carried on much after the same manner ; thus the mind is said to *imagine*,

*apprehend, conceive, discern, reflect*, etc., all figurative expressions ; and it will be found on examination that the higher the flights of the imagination the closer the idioms of language approach each other. This affinity, however, must have been closer at one time than it is at present ; for, by a law of human nature—from which, as was stated previously, language is not exempt—there are in the midst of the wear and tear of life changes continually taking place either for better or for worse ; or, as it has been picturesquely said—“ Words in the course of ages are tossed and rolled and chipped out of shape like the pebbles which are perpetually tumbled by the sea waves upon a shingly beach.” Now, as it is the very essence of a living language to appropriate and assimilate to itself whatever it finds congenial to its own life, so will it also rid itself of whatever is repugnant to it, and bring about other changes more consonant to its actual wants and exigencies. This process, however, is worked so silently that it is only after the change has been brought about that men feel aware of what has been going on.

The English language, in particular, from

its derivatory character, affords many striking illustrations of this change of meaning in words, not a few of which have so strayed and straggled from their primary signification, that though they may have undergone little, nay, not unfrequently, no outward change, yet they will often mislead a foreigner from whose language those very words are perhaps derived. In the Neo-Latin languages, for instance, the word *complexion* refers rather to the disposition of the body, to the peculiar cast of the constitution; though this word in English retains something of its primary meaning, *i.e.*, a complex state, a condition, yet in nine cases out of ten, it is now applied to the colour of the skin, and to the face in particular; hence the phrase *a fair, ruddy or dark complexion*. To *intoxicate*, from the Latin *in toxicum*, is, literally, to poison, whereas the ordinary meaning of it in English is to *make drunk*, as with spirituous liquors. The corresponding nouns intoxication and drunkenness are synonymous terms, and are both used in the proper and the improper sense. Again, the verb to *prevent*, from the Latin *prævenio*, *prevenire*, Sp. and Fr. *prevenir* formerly signified to come before, to precede, to

anticipate, to prepossess, to bias, to be beforehand with ; but in these meanings this verb is obsolete ; its present signification being to hinder, to stop, or intercept the approach of, as it is often easier to *prevent* evils than to remedy them. *Disgrace*, from the Fr. disgrace, misfortune, has come to mean out of favour, dishonour, shame ; as : he was a disgrace to his country ; to the disgrace of humanity. *Sanguine*, Fr. sanguin, Lat. sanguineus, though technically retaining its primary meaning, yet it is commonly used in the sense of warm, ardent ; as, a *sanguine temper*, to be *sanguine* in one's hopes, etc.

The following are a few whose outward form, though slightly disguised, would not be easily recognized by a foreigner : *Ditto*, from the It. *detto*, denoting aforesaid, or the same thing. *Dormouse*, from Lat. *dormiensmus* (?) the sleeping mouse. *Galligaskins*, large open hose, from being first worn by the Gallo-Cascones, or Gascons.\* *Dishevel*, Fr. *decheveler* ; de or dis, and cheveu, to suffer the hair to hang

\* Young Rip was generally seen trooping like a colt at his mother's heels, equipped in a pair of his father's cast-off galligaskins, etc.—IRVING.

loosely or negligently. *Kickshaw*, Fr. *quelque chose*, something, anything that has no particular name ; a dish so changed by cooking that it can scarcely be known. *Miscreant*, a word invented by the French crusaders (*mescreant*, *mécréant*), and still confined in that language to its primary sense, but has now, in English, the meaning of a vile wretch, an unprincipled man. Shakspeare has been accused of dealing harshly with the “noble warrior maid” (Joan of Arc) as he makes Richard Plantagenet address her as a “miscreant ;” but this word in Shakspeare’s time meant nothing more than a misbeliever, or one who embraced a false faith. *Villain* Fr., *vilain*, Low Lat. *villanus*, a servile tenant or serf, “*villæ et glebæ adscriptus* ;” but how far has this word strayed from its primary signification ! We call by the name of *Villain* the thief, the robber, the burglarian, the murderer, the incendiary, the ravisher, the seducer, the cheat, the swindler, etc., etc. Many other examples might easily be adduced of this continual change of meaning in words ; but how they at last settle down in all their different bearings it would be no easy matter

to account for, unless, indeed, M. Guizot's theory of the case in point be adopted, that common sense gives to words their ordinary signification, and common sense is the genius of mankind.\*

We have studiously made use of the expression *nature of words* rather than the ordinary term *etymology*, as we wish to avoid the obloquy which—deservedly or undeservedly is not now the question—has not infrequently been cast upon this part of linguistic studies ; and which, after all, is but the sifting out or tracing the true meaning of words through their different pedigrees. As a specimen of this ridicule, we cannot refrain from transcribing a couple of well-known examples, attributed to Dean Swift, who, in one of which, facetiously wants to prove that the Greek and Latin tongues were derived from the English, making out that *Andromache* was nothing more than *Andrew Mackay*. And the following, which none but the Dean in a witty moment could have hit upon: "Alexander the Great," he says, "was very fond of eggs roasted in hot

\* See GUIZOT—Histoire de la Civilisation, première leçon, mot *Civilization*.

ashes, As soon as his cooks heard he was come to dinner or supper they called aloud to their under-officers, '*All eggs under the grate,*' which, repeated every day at noon and evening, made strangers think it was the prince's real name, and they therefore gave him no other, and posterity has been ever since under the same delusion." But the Dean's wit often got the better of his judgment, as he plainly showed when he undertook to ascertain and *fix our language for ever*, thereby forgetting that language, as a necessary condition to its very being, has its ebbs and flows; and therefore etymology may very reasonably be called in to mark such changes.\* His contempt, however, for the origin and derivation of words should not be wondered at; for up to a very recent date, the study of etymology has been but

\* The well-known translator of Ossian and Homer, M. Cesarotti, who was held by Sismondi to be the first of modern Italian poets, speaking of etymology, says:—*A ben usar dei vocabili, si rende indispensabile la scienza etimologico, studio meschino, sol fecondo d' inezie finchè si stette fra le mani dei puri grammatici, ma che ai nostri tempi maneggiato da profondi eruditi ed insigni ragionatori, divenne fonte di utili e preziose notizie, studio a di cui gloria basta il dire, che formava le delizie del gran Leibnizio.*—*Filosofia delle Lingue.*

mere guess-work, a play of fancy, and, as such, could not claim the attention of the learned ; of late, however, it has assumed the form of a science, on which master-minds have been engaged, and who have made it an essential branch in the study of philology. "In a language like our own," says the author of *Aids to Reflection*, "so many words of which are derived from other languages, there are few modes of instruction more useful or more amusing than that of accustoming young people to seek for the etymology or primary meaning of the words they use."

As to the *history* of words, the importance of which we referred to above, we have to add here the weighty opinion of Locke, who says, "If we knew the origin of all the words we meet with we should be very much helped to know the ideas they were first applied to and made to stand for." We will therefore give an example or two from Trench's *Study of Words*, by way of illustration. "We all know," says the author, "what *tariff* means, namely, a fixed scale of duties levied upon imports. If you turn to a map of Spain you will take note of its southern point, and running out into the Straits

of Gibraltar, of a promontory, which from its position is admirably adapted for commanding the entrance of the Mediterranean Sea, and watching the exit and entrance of all ships. A fortress stands upon the promontory, called now, as it was also called in the times of the Moorish domination in Spain, 'Tarifa;' the name, indeed, is of Moorish origin. It was the custom of the Moors to watch from this point all merchant ships going into or coming out of the Midland Sea, and issuing from this stronghold, to levy duties according to a fixed scale on all merchandise passing in and out of the Straits, and this was called, from the place where it was levied, *tarifa* or *tariff*; and in this way we have acquired the word." Or again:

"What a record of great social revolutions—revolutions in nations and in the feelings of nations—the one word *frank* contains; which is used, as we all know, to express aught that is generous, straight-forward, and free. The Franks, I need not remind you, were a powerful German tribe, or association of tribes, which, at the breaking up of the Roman Empire, possessed themselves of Gaul, to which they gave their own name. They were the ruling,

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conquering people, honourably distinguished from the Gauls and degenerate Romans, among whom they established themselves by their independence, their love of freedom, their scorn of a lie ; they had, in short, the virtues which belong to a conquering and dominant race in the midst of an inferior and conquered one. And thus it came to pass that, by degrees, the name *frank*, which may have originally indicated merely a national, came to involve a moral distinction as well, and a *frank* man was synonymous not merely with a man of the conquering German race, but was an epithet applied to a person possessed of certain high moral qualities, which for the most part appertained to, and were found only in, men of that stock ; and thus in men's daily discourse, when they speak of a person as being *frank*, or when they use the word *franchise*, *enfranchisement*, to express civil liberties and immunities, their language there is the outcome, the record, and the result of great historic changes, bearing testimony to facts of history, whereof it may well happen that the speakers have never heard . . . I have already sought to find history embedded in the word *frank*, but I

must bring forward the Franks again, and ask you to consider whether the well-known fact that in the East, not Frenchmen alone, but all Europeans are so called, does not require to be accounted for? It can be so, and this wide usage of the word is indeed a deep footprint of the past. This appellation dates from the Crusades, and Michaud, the chief historian of these, with injustice finds herein an evidence that his countrymen took a decided lead, as their gallantry well fitted them to do, in these great romantic enterprises of the middle ages, impressing themselves so strongly on the mind and imagination of the East as *the* Crusading nation of Europe, that their name was extended to all the warriors of Christendom. And considering how large a proportion of the noblest Crusaders, as of others most influential in bringing these enterprises about, as Peter the Hermit, Pope Urban the Second, St. Bernard, were French, it must be allowed that the actual facts bear him out in his assertion."

## CHAPTER VIII.

Influences of the misuse of words—Familiarity with the language of a country necessary to a competent judgment of its literature—Niebuhr in this connection—Addison on peculiarities of the English language—National character reflected in language.

It is often repeated that the true use of speech is not so much to express our thoughts as to conceal them ; as to the degree of truth or falsehood contained in this common saying we shall offer no opinion ; the question under consideration is that as language is the record of both good and evil, of truth and error, everything that bears upon it is worthy of attention. “ He who,” says one whom we have often quoted, “ would examine the *influence* which words, *mere words*, have exercised on the minds of men might write a history of the world that would teach us more than any which we yet possess. Unfortunately this truth holds more forcibly with the dark, than with the bright side of man’s nature ; for he will often give utterance

to expressions the very reverse to his own feelings and experience.

This reminds us of one of those errors which has obtained currency, and which, at this time of day, is beyond all remedy ; we mean that of giving to the New World, not the name of the real discoverer, but that of one who, whatever his merits may have been, was, after all, but the mere geographer of the country actually bearing his name. This error arose, as A. von Humboldt has clearly shown in his *Cosmos*, not from any attempt on the part of Amerigo Vespucci to defraud Columbus of the merits of the discovery, but from his merely having published the first description of the newly-discovered countries, which publication fortuitously procured for him the high honour of giving his name to the whole continent of America. Still, the error stands there, and will stand to the end of time an unfortunate mistake."

The next example we have to bring forward on the influence of the misuse of words and language is an expression sedulously made use of by an eminent French author, which has gone far in spreading prejudice against a literature

which merited from the learned La Harpe the title of *Mother of all modern Literature*. M. Boileau in his IX. Satire, whether after cool reflection, or, which is more likely, merely for the sake of saying something pointed and antithetical, has branded the poetry of Tasso as mere tinsel; *cliquant du Tasse*, are his words. "A happy word," observes Dr. Hurd, speaking of this ill-merited reproach, "which strikes the ear and is carefully stored up in the memory, will do more harm than a volume of sound though severe criticism; and it did in fact, for a time destroy the well-founded reputation of Italian poetry." That the French poet should attack his foreign brethren of the lyre is not surprising, as he was not sparing of his sarcasms upon the author of *Paradise Lost*; but that the mild and sober-minded Addison should be so struck with the sound of this *cliquant* by giving it his full concurrence in one of his well-known Essays,\* is somewhat astonishing; "whence it became a byword," says Prescott, "a term of reproach upon the whole body of Italian letters." †

Voltaire, though not very indulgent to the

\* Spectator No. 5.    † Essays.

great English bard,\* was quite so to Tasso and Ariosto; for, writing to a young lady who requested his advice as to the best method of cultivating her literary talents, he says: “L’étude que vous avez faite de la langue italienne doit encore fortifier ce goût avec lequel vous êtes née, et que personne ne peut donner. Le Tasse et l’Arioste vous rendront plus de services que moi, et la lecture de nos meilleurs poètes vaut mieux que toutes les leçons.”

We will be bold enough to assert, that no man was ever a competent judge of the literature or character of another nation who was not familiar with its language. To have recourse to a translation may answer well enough when the original work is beyond our reach, or when we lack the power of deciphering its contents; for what has been said of a translation—that it may be compared to a carpet turned wrong side upwards, will also apply to the judgment we form of a people whose language we are unacquainted with—that judgment must ever be imperfect as it is taken at second hand.

\* Voltaire calls Hamlet a barbarous production, that would not be endured by the meanest populace in France or Italy. As to the author of it he exclaims: “what a drunken savage Shakspeare must have been!”

Niebuhr, indeed, goes so far as to say that "the writer, or even the student, of history, ought, if possible, to know all nations in their own tongue. Languages have one inscrutable origin, as have all national peculiarities, and he has but an imperfect knowledge of a people who does not know their language." Of these national peculiarities to be traced in the language of a people, Addison gives us several instructive examples in one of his Essays. "The English language," he says, "is wonderfully adapted to a man sparing of his words, and an enemy to loquacity." The writer illustrates his argument by showing, firstly, that where the words of the language are not actually monosyllabic—that is mostly such words as are derived from foreign tongues—an Englishman will clip and curtail them in the rapidity of pronunciation; as, for instance, the following: liberty, orator, conspiracy, medicine, etc. Secondly, by closing in one syllable the termination of the imperfect tense and past participles, as: "drown'd, arriv'd, walk'd, 'for' drowned, arrived, walked." Thirdly, by the drawing of two words into one, as: "mayn't, can't, won't, shan't," and the like, for "can not, will not, shall not." Fourthly, by the

frequent suppression of the relatives, "whom, which, and that." \* After these few practical remarks the author concludes with: "I have only considered our language as it shows the genius and natural temper of the English, which is modest, thoughtful and sincere, and which, perhaps, may recommend the people, though it has spoiled the tongue."

Pursuing this train of thought into other languages, the writer points to much of what is characteristic in each, from the turn of mind of the people who respectively speak them. "It is certain," he says, "the light talkative humour of the French has not a little infected their tongue, which might be shown by many instances; as the genius of the Italians, which is so much addicted to music and ceremony, has moulded all their words and phrases to those particular uses. The stateliness and gravity of the Spaniards are seen to perfection in the solemnity of their language; and the blunt honest humour of the Germans sounds better

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\* Foreigners become sensibly aware of this impatience of pronunciation, for Englishmen are prone to carry the same into other tongues. "Les Anglais," says Voltaire, "gagnent deux heures par jour sur nous, en mangeant la moitié de leurs mots."

in the roughness of the High-Dutch than it would in a politer tongue.\*

As all nations have their peculiar idiosyncrasies or turns of thought which will often fail to find their equivalents in another tongue, the national character will always peer through its language ; so much so, indeed, that it may be held as a moral barometer, indicating and permanently marking the rise and fall of a nation's life. "To study a people's language will be to study *them* ; and to study them at best advantage ; there where they present themselves to us under fewest disguises most nearly as they are." Of this we shall be convinced if we but take a moment's glance, first of all, at what has been appropriately called, "the wit of one man and the wisdom of many," or, in the words of Cervantes "short sentences with long experiences," † of which all nations have many in

\* Spectator, No. 135.

† Hay un refran en nuestra Espana, a mi paracer, muy verdadero como todos lo sono, por ser sentencias breves sacadas de la lengua y discreta experiencia, y el que yo digo, dice : *Iglesia, ò mar ò casa real*, como si mas claramente dijera : quien quisiere valer y ser rico, siga ò la Iglesia ò navegue ejercitando el arte de la mercancia, o entre à servir à los reyes en sus casas, porque dice : *Mas vale megaja de rey que merced de senor.*

common, and each again has many peculiar to itself; for instance, *Make hay while the sun shines*," points directly to the inconstancy of an English sky, and warns its inhabitants to take time by the forelock, for delays are dangerous. Here, though the moral may be applied to men of all countries, yet the proverb itself would hardly have been invented by a people of a more favoured climate than our own. *Judge not of a ship as she lies in the stocks*, speaks of a maritime people. *All are not monks who wear a cowl*, \* savours of a country where the monastic orders abound. *Nothing venture, nothing have*, tells clearly of a speculative and commercial people. None but a Protestant and German people could have first given utterance to the following, "*Not every parish priest can wear Dr. Luther's shoes*;" and the next speaks at once of the Turk, and of the animal productions of his climate: *Death is a black camel which kneels at every man's door*. The French proverb, *La couronne (ou le royaume) de France ne tombe point en quenouille*, tells us that, by virtue of the Salic Law, the crown cannot fall to the distaff—cannot devolve to the female line.

\* It. *Non e l'abito che fa il monaco*.

What country but Spain could give birth to the following: *About the king and the Inquisition, hush ! \**

If from wise sayings we pass to metaphorical expressions and allusions, there again we shall meet with many sentiments that bespeak the national character and feeling :—

And chiefly Thou, O Spirit ! that dost prefer  
Before *all temples* the upright heart and pure,  
Instruct me, for Thou know'st. . . . .

Coleridge remarks on this passage, that John Milton himself is in every line of the *Paradise Lost* ; and another critic adds, “we certainly see him here in his ardent piety and his puritanic contempt for *splendid temples*.”

The next quotation from Hojeda's *Christiade*, speaks of a different clime and of other national religious feelings :—

Canto al Hijo di Dios, humano y muerto  
Con dolores y afrentas por el hombre ;  
Musa divina, en su costado abierto,  
Baña mi lengua y muevala en su nombre.

“I sing the Son of God, who was man and died for man amid anguish and insults. Divine Muse, *Steep my tongue in his open side*, and make it move in his name.” M. Arnould,

\* Sp. Con el Rey y la Inquisicion, chitos !

from whom these lines are quoted, asks whether any one but a Spanish monk in the time of Philip the Second could ever have written them.\*

\* *Es. de Théorie et d'histoire.* See also FARRAR—*On Language.*

## CHAPTER IX.

Influence of the Bible on English language—Illustrations thereof from various authors—Current phrases emanating from Sunday writers—Preponderance of Shakespearean phrases—La Fontaine's contributions—Dante's influence—Norman influence on English language—Illustrations from Scott's works.

It has been said, and with a great deal of truth, that for the English people "the Bible is a part of the national mind and the anchor of national seriousness." Being from his childhood in the constant habit of reading the Scriptures, an Englishman's mind becomes imbued, not merely with the subject-matter, which points out to him his future destiny, but his *language* is necessarily tinctured with oriental figures and bold metaphors, which he in after life unconsciously makes use of, both on subjects of a great moment, and in his most ordinary conversation. And this, perhaps, may account for that undefinable something which strikes a foreigner on his first reading an Eng-

lish work of imagination. Of this stereotyped language, so to speak, we shall quote a few sentences. For instance, in the preface to his work *On the Sublime*, Burke says: "The characters of nature are legible, it is true, but they are not plain enough *to enable those who run to read them*. (Habakkuk ii. 2). Though I had great expectations, yet I was resolved, by strict economy, to make my slender purse hold out, until *my uncle should give up the ghost*, or rather the estate." (Acts v. 10). †

Macaulay—whose sound and idiomatic English has almost become proverbial with the nation—draws largely upon the language of the Bible; to such a degree, in fact, as to indulge in it; at least we have, within a few pages of his immortal Essays, noted a repetition of the same Biblical phrase. In his Essay on Mackintosh's History he says: "*yet a little while*, and a military despotism rose out of the confusion and threatened the independence of every state of Europe. And *yet again a little while* and the whole dynasty returned," etc. . . . And further on, in his Essay on Cowley and Milton, he writes: "And *yet a little while*, and

† IRVING—Tales of a Traveller.

the usurper comes forth from Westminster Hall, in his robe of ermine, with the golden staff in one hand and the Bible in the other, amidst the roaring of the guns, and the shouting of the people, *And yet a little while*, and the doors are thronged with multitudes in black." (St. John xvi. 16). Speaking of the Puritans, the eminent historian makes use of the same Biblical expression as the one above cited by Burke—whose much-admired style, by the way, he holds, falls far short of Milton's—"The odious and ridiculous parts of their character," says he, "lie on the surface. *He that runs may read them*; nor have there been wanting attentive and malicious observers to point them out."\*

It has always struck us that Wellington's well-known exclamation at Waterloo, of "*Up Guards, and at them*," was but a spontaneous echo of the Psalmist's "*Up, Lord, and let not man have the upper hand*." It is owing to the simplicity, both of vocabulary and structure, that the excellence of the English version of the Scriptures rests, and Coleridge recommends the study of them as a means of

\* Essay on Milton.

acquiring a thorough Saxon style; adding, that the language of that man who is familiar with these writings can never be low or vulgar.

There are also men of superior minds, who leave the impress of their genius on the language of their countries; two of such are Shakspeare in England and Dante in Italy. Both of these eminent poets have bequeathed to their countrymen many thoughts and expressions bearing the image and superscription of their own lofty minds, but which have now become the property of the whole nation. "One of the profoundest tests," says De Quincey, "by which we can measure the congeniality of an author with the national genius and temper, is the degree in which his thoughts, or his phrases interweave themselves with our daily conversation, and pass into the currency of the language." With respect to Shakspeare, a large dictionary might be made as such phrases as: "*win golden opinions,*" "*in my mind's eye,*" "*overstep the modesty of nature,*" "*more honour'd in the breach than in the observance,*" "*palmy state,*" "*my poverty and not my will, consents,*" and so forth without

end. Many of the thoughts and homely sayings of La Fontaine which go to make up his immortal Fables, are constantly quoted by his countrymen, and have actually become household words with the nation.

As for the influence Dante has had upon his country's language, let us listen to what Byron, in his Diary, says of him: "I have read Schlegel on Dante; he says that at no time has the greatest and most national of all Italian poets ever been much the favourite of his countrymen."

"'Tis false! There have been more editors and commentators of Dante than all their poets put together. *Not* a favourite! Why, they talk Dante, write Dante, and think and dream Dante at this moment (1821) to an excess which would be ridiculous but that he deserves it. I don't wonder at the enthusiasm of the Italians about Dante. He is the poet of liberty. Persecution, exile, the dread of a foreign grave, could not shake his principles. There is no Italian gentleman, scarcely any well-educated girl, that has not all the finer passages of Dante at the finger's end."

We subjoin a few lines from his great work,

which have become the language of every day's occurrence :—

*Perdere il ben dell' intelletto*, to be out of one's mind, lose one's senses. *Dopo il pasto ha piu fame che pria*, said of a person who has an insatiable desire or appetite, and one who is still more greedy and craving when his object has been attained than before. *Lunga promessa coll' attender corto*, not to be so good as one's word. *Gente cui si fa notte innanzi sera*; applied to dull, weak-headed persons. *Non ragioniam di lor, ma guarda e passa*, to take little or no notice of persons or things, to pass them slightly, etc., etc.

Again, as to the effect produced by Goethe on the mind and language of his countrymen, we may gather a glimpse from his translators who nearly all complain of the difficulty of translating him, or rather his Faust—which, as a French critic observes, “contient Goethe tout entier”—and this mainly on account of the numberless lines that have passed into proverbial expressions—expressions applicable to the theologian, the scholar, the soldier, the man of the world, the student of philosophy, etc., so that not only have all these fallen in for their share

of the thought and language of that all-embracing mind, but these sentences have finally settled down as the common mental stock of the whole German people.

Enough, we think, has already been said of the necessity of an acquaintance with a people's language if we wish to know and judge them thoroughly ; for it is only by listening to a nation's poets, orators, dramatists, and historians that we can feel the throbbings of that nation's life-blood flowing through its arteries ; we would, therefore, fain say nothing further of this necessity, but here the word *historian* calls to mind the immense resources that lie in language in general, at the command of him who undertakes to chronicle the sayings and doings of any community or people.

It will often happen that a significant word, or even the name of a place, will open up to a writer a train of speculation, and give him, as it were, the key-note to his researches and lead to his final success. Witness the important conclusions drawn by Mommsen in his *History of Rome*, respecting the different races that occupied the Italian soil centuries back. In his opening chapters, the learned historian has

wholly—through the analysis and comparison of words, chiefly those of the various industrial and agricultural appliances, in common to the several dialects of the country—been enabled to infer no longer the doubtful but the positive relation in which those different tribes and communities stood to one another. The history of England, too, might almost be inferred from her language, for it bears the marks of the vicissitudes and changes which she has suffered from many hands and many quarters. “The subjugation of a nation by a nation,” says Macaulay, speaking of England, “has seldom, even in Asia, been more complete. The ruthless Conqueror, not satisfied with trampling and crushing the children of the soil, would fain have uprooted their very language ; for that purpose he *did* much, but could not do all, and there stand thousands of words, each to tell its own eventful story.

It would appear to be a natural consequence that the idiom of the dominant race should have absorbed or impressed the badge of its superiority upon that of the vanquished ; but it is remarkable that no such result ensued. In the *Brut* of Layamon which was composed a

century and a half after the Conquest, there are less than fifty French words; and equally untainted by foreign ingredient is the *Ormulum*, a metrical paraphrase of those parts of the New Testament which were employed in the daily service of the Church, and written about 1225.

“But seldom,” says another learned writer, “is a people utterly exterminated, for the proud conqueror leaves *of the poor of the land* to till the glebe anew; and these enslaved outcasts, though they may hand down no memory of the splendid deeds of the nation’s heroes, yet retain a most tenacious recollection of the names of the hamlets which their ignoble progenitors inhabited, and near to which their fathers were interred.”\* What a lesson in language and

\*TAYLOR—Words and Places.

Mr. Craik entertains a different opinion as to William’s efforts to do away with the language of the country. He says, “There is no probability in the assertion which has often been made that the Conqueror sought to extirpate the English language and to substitute the French in its place. He was incapable of entertaining a project so palpably impracticable. So far, in fact, was he from cherishing any dislike to the language of his new subjects that he is recorded to have had at first applied himself vigorously to learn English, till more pressing occupations compelled him to give up the attempt. He probably found that

history does the illustrious author of Waverley give us in the opening of his Ivanhoe! In the personage of Wamba, and in one of his playful moods:—*ridentem dicere verum quid vetat?*—he affords us food for a world of historical reflection. “The swine turned Normans to my comfort!” Quoth Gurth, “expound that to me, Wamba, for my brain is too dull, and my mind too vexed to read riddles.” “Why, how call you those grunting brutes running about on their four legs?” demanded Wamba. “Swine, fool, swine,” said the swineherd, “every fool knows that.” “And swine is good Saxon,” said the jester, “but how call you the sow when she is flayed and drawn and quartered, and hung up by the heels like a traitor?”

“Pork,” answered the swineherd.

“I am very glad every fool knows that too,” said Wamba; “and pork, I think, is good Norman-French; and so when the brute lives, and is in charge of a Saxon slave, she goes by her Saxon name; but becomes a Norman, and is called pork, when she is carried to the Castle

to conquer the language was harder work than to conquer the country, at the age at which he had arrived, for he was about forty when he became king.—*English Language.*

hall to feast among the nobles. What dost thou think of this doctrine, friend Gurth, ha?"

"It is but too true doctrine, friend Wamba, however it got into thy fool's pate!"

"Nay I can tell you more," said Wamba, in the same tone. "There is old alderman Ox continues to hold his Saxon epithet, while he is under the charge of serfs and bondsmen such as thou, but becomes Beef, a fiery French gallant, when he arrives before the worshipful jaws that are destined to consume him. Mynheer Calf, too, becomes Monsieur le Veau in the like manner. He is Saxon when he requires tendance, and takes a Norman name when he becomes matter of enjoyment."

If we turn from the churlish but humorsome Wamba and his etymological definitions of eatables—at which, by the way, he appears to be no bad hand—to one word among a thousand come down to us from the Norman conquest, we shall find in it wherewith to enlighten us a little as to the *indulgence* with which the conquered were treated; we allude to the word *curfew*, or French *couvre-feu*.

This was a law introduced by the Conqueror, enforcing the inhabitants, under severe penalties,

to put out their fires and lights on the tolling of a bell at a fixed hour, which was usually at eight o'clock in the evening. The *Curfew* has furnished a theme for many a ballad; *Longfellow* has also written on the same subject :

Solemnly, mournfully  
Dealing its dole  
The *Curfew Bell*  
Is beginning to toll.  
Cover the embers  
And put out the light ;  
Toil comes with the morning,  
And rest with the night, etc.

The opening lines of Gray's *Elegy written in a Country Churchyard* pathetically remind us of the mournful peal of the *Curfew* bell, and of the *obedience* it exacted.

The Curfew tolls the knell of parting day,  
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,  
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,  
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

But though the proud Barons who followed in the trail of the Conqueror did not succeed in substituting their own language for that of the common people, yet, as the Norman-French was for a time the language of the Court, and as it afterwards became the forensic, and to a

great extent the military, language of England, they have handed down to us many words which stand as historical evidence between the conqueror and the conquered. As a specimen we might quote the motto of the Sovereigns of Britain themselves: *Dieu et mon Droit*; or that of *Honi* (more properly *honne*) *soit qui mal y pense*; or the following expressions of the bar: *Arraignment, arson, bailment, burglary, larceny, nonsuit, parol, evidence, recognizance*, etc.; and the military terms: *officer, general, colonel, major, lieutenant, captain, soldier*, etc.; these, with hundreds of other words, which, though by this time have merged, or rather worked themselves into the very warp and woof of the native texture, still stand forth and tell of bygone events.

## CHAPTER X.

A Universal Language—Advantages thereof—Many writers in favour of the possibility of its compilation—Record of various attempts towards this end—Summary.

After dwelling, as we have done at some length, on the study of language in general, as a mental training, and after laying considerable stress on the importance of the study of modern languages in particular; it may not perhaps be deemed altogether amiss, or out of place, to make a few passing remarks upon a subject which, though for some time has lain dormant, and become all but extinct, has again of late been awakened, and in no small degree canvassed in various quarters—we allude to that project of philanthropists—a *Universal Language*. The general complaint made against the numberless tongues spoken on the globe, is that they have been, and still are, the great barrier of intercourse between man and man, and between nation and nation, and

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consequently the cause of the slow progress of civilization. "The confusion of tongues," says Bacon in his *Advancement of Learning*, "the first great judgment of God upon the ambition of man hath chiefly imbarred the open trade and intercourse of learning and knowledge." It would be idle to attempt gainsaying this self-evident truth; for the curse that was pronounced on the presumption of man two thousand two hundred and fifty years before the Christian era, is still felt by the human race almost at large. To break down this barrier some distinguished men, such as Wilkins, Leibnitz, Volney, and others have opined that a language might be devised that should become the medium of intercourse between all nations. The seventeenth century, it appears, was most fruitful in some of these attempts; "A German Prince," (we quote from Farrar), "offered a reward of three hundred crowns for the best universal language, and Becker wrote in consequence his *Notitia Linguarum universalis*. The prince repaid him by compliments, and asked him to dinner," which was more, says a witty Frenchman, than the

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thing was worth. The work was published at Frankfort in 1664, but in all likelihood, has sunk for ever into oblivion. Bishop Wilkins' *Essay towards a Real Character and Universal Language* is a little better known. This work consists of one thick volume in folio, and has generally been praised for the ingenuity displayed throughout. His scheme consisted in making use of the numerical figures which, though pronounced differently in different languages, yet were meant to convey the same idea to nations that might make use of them. Besides these, he availed himself of all the arithmetical, mathematical, and astronomical conventional signs; and perhaps the musical notes, together with the flats and sharps, etc., and all such symbols as are intelligible to several nations. The nouns were a series of antitheses: thus, *da* meant God, *ada* the devil; *dad*, heaven; *adad*, hell; *dab*, soul; *adab*, body; *pida*, presence, *pidas*, absence; *tadu*, power, *tadus*, imbecility. The numbers were fashioned much after the same way; *pubal* meant 10, *pobar*, 100, *pobam*, 1000, etc. "It would be impossible," says the author just quoted, "to imagine any spoken language so inconceiv-

ably dry, and dreary, and bald, and dead as this ;” and yet Max Müller, from whom we have borrowed some of the preceding observations, seems to countenance the Bishop’s ideas, and thinks the scheme a practical one.

The erudite Leibnitz, too, turned his mind to the work of inventing a universal language ; and though he admitted the difficulty of arranging a language to answer all the purposes of life, yet he did not despair, he said, of final success ; his only regret was being too far advanced in life to carry out his scheme. What this scheme really was is not known ; but it was probably founded on the algebraical figures, though perhaps differing from that of the Bishop’s.

Gioberti—to mention a writer of our times—on this subject remarks, “a time may come when, out of the wrecks of the many well known tongues, one universal language may be framed, to bring about the philological unity of the human race. And perhaps of all the languages spoken at the present day, or which have been spoken for the time past, two alone will live in the memory of men, namely, the Hebrew and the Greek.” After assigning a

reason for this supposition, the writer very strangely concludes with: "Nevertheless it would be folly to believe that, whenever such a time may come, there will be but a single language in the world, to the exclusion of every other particular tongue, by which one nation is distinguished from another."\*

There appears to be something flattering in proclaiming to the world startling opinions, even when the proclaimer himself has few, or, perhaps, no hopes of seeing his speculations brought to bear. This is most particularly the case with philologists, and would seem to be a privilege peculiar to their calling. M. Arnould, in his *Essais de Théorie*, has devoted a short but interesting chapter on the subject of a universal language. As a Frenchman, of course, the language he propends for is French. He warmly exhorts his countrymen to exert their endeavours to bring about so desirable an object, and ingenuously warns them that, though it altogether lies in the power of Providence to crown human enterprises with success, yet it also depends on nations and individuals to

\* Teoria del sovranaturale. Vol. II., page 447.

deserve that success by strenuous efforts to attain their object. Some of his expressions are too striking to be omitted here. "Thus then," says he, "one of the languages spoken at the present day will—at a time which it would be impossible to determine—become the language of European unity, nay, perhaps of universal unity, either to assist the nationalities in the process of their original development, or to prevent that process from being accomplished. Either a language of union and liberty, or one of thralldom and tyranny . . . ."\*

We would fain be indulgent to M. Arnould, as to every Frenchman, for the overweening love he bears to his language, as we are all in a greater or less degree partial to our own. Many an Englishman fancies his language is one day to become the prevailing tongue; and in truth, if any plausible reason could be given for it becoming so, it is certainly that of the *one* language of Europe forming, as it were, the "connecting link between the North and South, between the languages spoken by the Teutonic nations of the North, and by the Romance of the South, which holds on to both; which

\* Essais de Théorie, pp.319-324.

partakes of both ; which is as a middle term between both." \*

We think the most enlightened and rational view of the case—making a slight allowance for the writer's being an Englishman—has been taken by the learned Dr. Donaldson, who, when speaking of the Latin tongue, and of the impossibility of its ever becoming a spoken language again, remarks :—The Latin and French languages stand related to one another, not only in the connection of affinity, but still more so in the important position which they have occupied as political and literary organs of communication. They have both striven to become the common language of civilized and educated men, and they had singular recom-

\* In a very interesting Essay on language, M. L. Menard—who, by the way, is no stickler for modern languages, nor one who overrates the human faculty of the present age—thus expresses himself on this point :—La diffusion des langues européennes à la surface du globe semble prépara l'unité future du langage. La prépondérance toujours croissante de la race anglo-saxonne peut faire prévoir que sa langue obtiendra à la longue l'universalité, d'autant que cette langue, malgré la richesse de son vocabulaire, se rapproche des langues monosyllabiques par, sa pauvreté grammaticale et son caractère analytique, condition que la rend à la fois facilement accessible aux races inférieures, et très-propre à répondre aux besoins de plus en plus pratiques des sociétés nouvelles—*L'Année Philosophique*, 1867.

mendations for the office which they partially assumed. For power of condensation, for lucid perspicuity, and for the practical exposition of common matters, there are few idioms that can compete with the Latin or with the French. In many particulars they fall far behind the Greek and German; in many more they are surpassed by the English, and it seems now to be determined that neither Cæsar nor Napoleon was destined to reverse the decree of Providence;\* that man, though the one reasoning and speaking creature, should in different parts of the world express his thoughts in different languages. If there is one idiom which seems both worthy and likely to include within it the articulate utterances of all the world, it is our own—for we, too, “are sprung of earth’s first blood,” and the sun never sets upon our Saxondom.† But

\* Gibbon says the Romans were so sensible of the influence of language over national manners, that it was their most serious care to extend, with the progress of their arms, the use of the Latin tongue. (Ch. II. *Decline and Fall*). In fact, a plurality of languages in one and the same State may be considered a political curse; witness Austria. See also Macchiavelli’s *Kingcraft*, Ch. III.

† Varronianus

even should anything like a common language be ever framed, and finally brought to bear, it may safely be predicted that it will never be achieved by the hand of a conqueror. No, nothing but the willing servants of commercial enterprise, good-will, and concord among civilized nations will ever bring about so vast an undertaking ; and many, many a long year must still glide away, together with the all but total change of the actual state of society, before the enormous work of the realization of the unity of mankind can be achieved ; or, to conclude in the picturesque language of a much lamented historian, but used on a different subject—When some traveller from New Zealand shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, take his stand on London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's, then, and not before, may the whole earth be again of one language and one speech.

It has been our endeavour in the foregoing sketch to prove, first, that the study of language, in its widest acceptation, is an efficient instrument for the unfolding of the mental powers ; secondly, that modern languages—over and above their

\* MACAULAY—*Ranke's History of the Popes.*

practical utility—are, when properly and systematically conducted, fully adequate to bring about what the study of the ancient languages have hitherto aimed at and professed to do.\* We now close these desultory remarks with one or two illustrations by distinguished writers on this present subject, not so much with the object of strengthening our position on what we have been all along contending for, but for the value these illustrations contain in themselves. In a Latin letter addressed to an Italian scholar, who was at that time preparing a work on his own language, Milton thus writes to him: “Whoever in a state knows how to form wisely the manners of men, and to rule them at home and in war by excellent institutes, him in the first place, above others, I should esteem worthy of all honour; *but, next to him, the man who strives to establish, in maxims and*

\*We wish it to be observed that we say *systematically conducted*, for no man can be more shallow than the mere smatterer of languages. And Milton truly remarks: “Though a linguist should pride himself to have all the tongues that Babel cleft the words into, yet if he had not studied the solid things in them, as well as the world and lexicons, he were nothing so much to be esteemed a learned man as any yeoman or tradesman competently wise in his mother dialect only.”

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*rules, the method and habit of speaking and writing derived from a good age of the nation, and, as it were, to fortify the same round with a kind of wall, the daring to overleap which, a law, only short of that of Romulus, should be used to prevent.* Should we choose to compare the two in respect to utility, it is the former only that can make the social existence of the citizens just and holy; but it is the latter that makes it splendid and beautiful, which is the next thing to be desired. The one, as I believe, supplies a noble courage and intrepid counsels against an enemy invading the territory, the other takes to himself the task of extirpating and defeating, by means of a learned detective police of ears, and a light infantry of good authors, that barbarism which makes large inroads upon the minds of men, and is a destructive enemy to genius. Nor is it to be considered of small importance *what language, pure or corrupt*, a people has, or what is their *customary degree of propriety of speaking it*—a matter which oftener than once was the salvation of Athens; nay, as it is Plato's opinion that, by a change in the manner and habit of dress, serious commotions and mutations are

portended in a commonwealth, I for my part would rather believe that the fall of that city and its low and obscure condition followed on the general vitiation of its usage in the matter of speech ; for, let the words of a country be in part unhandsome and offensive in themselves, in part debased by wear, and wrongly uttered, and what do they declare, but by no light indication, that the inhabitants of that country are an indolent, idle, yawning race, with minds already long prepared for any amount of servility ? On the other hand, we have never heard that any empire, any state, did not flourish, in at least a middling degree, *as long as its own liking and care for its language lasted.*"

So thought the all-knowing Milton of the sacredness in which a language ought to be held by every man and nation. With regard to the second place in a state awarded by him to those who make it their concern and profession to preserve their national language pure, he stands not alone in his opinion. Max Müller goes a step farther and says, "The intellectual and moral character of a nation is formed in schools and universities, and those who educate a people have always been its *real*

*masters*, though they may go by a more modest name.”\*

As to the second point in question, we shall note a short passage from Vol. IV. of the *Westminster Review on the Present System of Education*: “A language that can be read, is worth something ; but a language that can be spoken as well as read, has at least one value more. If a language which we want every day as a means of intercourse is a desirable acquisition, a language which includes a thousand authors ought also to be more valuable than the one which contains a hundred; and if, therefore, language is an exercise of the faculties, it is more than evident that the one that can be spoken—the one in which we can read, through a long life—is the best worth cultivating, because we gain two ends by one purchase.”

According to the present system of education, the acquirement of foreign languages is placed within the reach of every one ; to neglect the benefits afforded by the study of them would not only be to forfeit many of the pleasures and requirements of society, but would also prove

\* The German Classics. Preface, page XXII.

highly detrimental to the knowledge of our own tongue. It is a trite observation, that he who knows but his own language can hardly be said to know that ; or, more emphatically, “even as a hawk flieth not high with one wing, even so, a man reacheth not excellence with one tongue.”\* We are apt to slight what we are familiar with, and this is particularly the case with our mother-tongue. It is too intimately connected with our feelings, too closely entwined with our thoughts, to become an object of minute attention. It mainly rests, then, through a comparison with other tongues, to become sensible of the beauties and defects of our own : or, in the words of an eminent German critic : “As every foreign language, even a living one, must of necessity be acquired in a more exact manner than our vernacular tongue, the mind becomes sharpened for the perception of the general principles of language, and, in the end, we apply to the polishing and enriching of our own language that acuteness which we have been accustomed to exercise on others.”† What the greatest of modern poets

\* ROGER ASCHAM—The Schoolmaster.

† F. VON SCHLEGEL—Lectures on the History of Literature.

—"the glory of the human intellect,"—has most forcibly expressed touching our spiritual nature may be applied, in a remarkable degree, in the present instance, both with regard to every man's native language and to the acquisition of a foreign tongue :"

Good Brutus, be prepared to hear ;  
And, since you know you cannot see yourself  
So well as by reflection, I, your glass,  
Will modestly discover to yourself  
That of yourself which you know not of.\*

SHAKESPEARE—Julius Cæsar. Act I. Scene II.

## APPENDIX.

On the best methods of studying Foreign Languages.

I willingly . . . . .  
. . . place on record my views with regard to the HOSSFELD Method of teaching languages, as its many distinguishing characteristics—especially the happy blending of the *utile* with the *dulce*—mark it out as one of surpassing excellence and value, and I do not express myself too strongly when I state that I consider that the series of volumes has commenced a new era in English linguistic scholarship.

Among the educational problems which have up to the present remained unsolved, that of the best method of teaching languages has stood pre-eminent. Numerous processes, called “systems,” are, it is true, in use among us, and it is also true that by means of some of them a certain measure of success is attainable, but the principles on which success or failure

depend, are imperfectly understood by the majority of teachers.

The various systems now in vogue may be roughly divided into two classes, the "Oral" and the "Grammatical," and the method of procedure in each may, I think, be aptly illustrated by applying them to the tuition of a musical instrument—say, the organ. Briefly, under the "Oral" method the pupil would, at the outset be seated at the instrument with a piece of music before him, and, without any preliminary systematized instruction with regard to the arrangement of the keyboard, stops, etc., or to musical nomenclature, he would be instructed to get through the piece by hook or by crook, with the help now and then of a word addressed to him in strictly technical language, no care being taken to employ words familiar to him, or to avoid the use of terms with which he was previously unacquainted.

Still continuing the parallel ; under the "Grammatical" system, before the pupil is allowed to touch the keyboard he is made acquainted with the names and qualities of the stops and their judicious arrangement for certain effects, and other technical details in

connection with the mechanical aspect of the art, after or concurrently with which he receives instruction on the shapes and values of notes, key tonality, etc., though only so far as is necessary for the due interpretation of a piece of music of the most elementary nature, care being taken never to employ technical terms before ensuring that they are fully understood. This done, the pupil is confronted with a simple exercise and he puts into practice what he has learnt of theory.

The "Oral" system is based on the *dictum* that the proper method of learning a foreign language is that pursued by a child in acquiring its own, and although at first sight the method appears to be founded on just and logical principles, yet wherever it has been adopted the result has been, in my experience, a portentous failure, and invariably when teachers have been induced to substitute this method for the older one they have speedily relinquished it and returned to the latter. Nor are the reasons far to seek, the chief one being the slow progress attained which is inevitable when we consider the very superficial and limited vocabulary of a child of ten who has received no formal lessons

in grammar. Such a child will virtually have been undergoing tuition on the "Oral" method during nearly the whole of its waking moments for at least nine years, and even after this it will possess a less degree of command of its native idiom than that attainable in three months by a foreign child of ten receiving competent tuition on the "Grammatical" system.

To advert to the HOSSFELD Method, which is a happy combination of both grammatical and oral, it lays no pretensions to opening up a royal route to its goal, but claims originality in the manner in which the features embodied are presented, and the thoroughness with which its leading principles are adhered to and carried out to the minutest detail.

The most striking feature, and one which will at once commend itself to practical teachers acquainted with the recognised principles underlying youthful educative processes, is the judicious manner in which matter corresponding to the four great divisions of the study of a language—Reading, Grammar, Conversation and Translation—is combined and interspersed in such continual variety, so that the mind of the

learner shall not be unduly fatigued by protracted exercise in one direction, thus obviating that *ennui* so universally experienced by children who are compelled to the drudgery of learning languages by an excessive prolongation of a mechanical and monotonous word-drill.

So far as the genius of the various languages admits, the various volumes of the "Method" follow the same plan. At the commencement are set forth by means of comparisons drawn from the student's own language, sound by sound, the tones and tone-combinations common to the idiom under discussion, in accordance with a principle signally characteristic of the Method—"procedure from the known to the unknown."

These preliminary essentials of pronunciation having been disposed of, the remainder of the book is divided into sixty-two lessons, each of which is sub-divided into four sections.

Section 1 gives the Rules of the grammar and remarks thereon. The explanations are given in the briefest manner consistent with rigid accuracy and in a form that they may be easy of comprehension and readily retained, the powerful principle of locality being attended to

and differing or like phenomena in the student's own language being referred to, on the principle again of "proceeding from the known, &c."

Here, as throughout the book, is exhibited a praiseworthy characteristic which is vigorously adhered to, viz., the eschewal of all matter to be learnt parrot-fashion without being fully understood. Thus in all sentences used to illustrate a rule care has been taken that the context shall embody nothing but what has been explained previously. To make clear my meaning: In a French grammar before me the author is dealing with the introduction of "t" in "a-t-il" and gives the sentence "*A-t-il de la cire ?*" (Has he any wax ?) to illustrate its use. Now the sentence is perfectly correct, but ill-chosen, inasmuch as the idiomatic use of "de la" for "any" has not been previously discussed. This is one of the points of detail wherein lies the excellence of the HOSSFELD Method, which, unfortunately, is not apparent without a careful examination of a volume.

Section 2 consists of a vocabulary and graduated exercises for translation into and from English, in which the rules and verbs on the preceding page are exemplified. The exercises

consist generally of colloquial phrases on a wide and varied range of topics such as naturally present themselves in daily life, for there is no reason why the pupil, whilst acquiring the language, should not also be interested by important facts and ideas, but here as elsewhere heed has been particularly taken to exclude, not only every sentence, but even every word that could offend the most fastidious ear.

Section 3 is devoted to questions similar to those asked at examinations, and of a conversation exemplifying, as far as possible, rules previously noticed, but in all cases devoid of matter beyond the comprehension of the pupil at the stage then reached. The questions, while they will enable the private student to ascertain for himself how far he has mastered the several parts of the subject as he proceeds, will serve the teacher of a class as specimens of the more detailed and varied examination to which he should subject his pupils, whilst the sentences of the conversations may be multiplied almost indefinitely and employed for *viva voce* practice by interchanging words already learned.

Section 4 consists of a Reading Exercise

accompanied by, in the earlier specimens, an interlinear translation. This has not only to be read aloud, but also translated by the aid of the indications given at the foot.

These Reading Exercises are all carefully graduated and are for the most part taken from the works of standard authors, and all new words are to be found in the vocabularies at the end of the book, where the precise meaning of the word as used is expressly defined, and thus the pupil has not to consult a dictionary where his judgment is divided by a mass of different interpretations.

Such is my unbiassed opinion of the plans and capabilities of the Method, and the numerous published letters from eminent practical teachers afford ample proof that the adoption of the volumes as class-books invariably yields the most favourable results.

THE END.

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